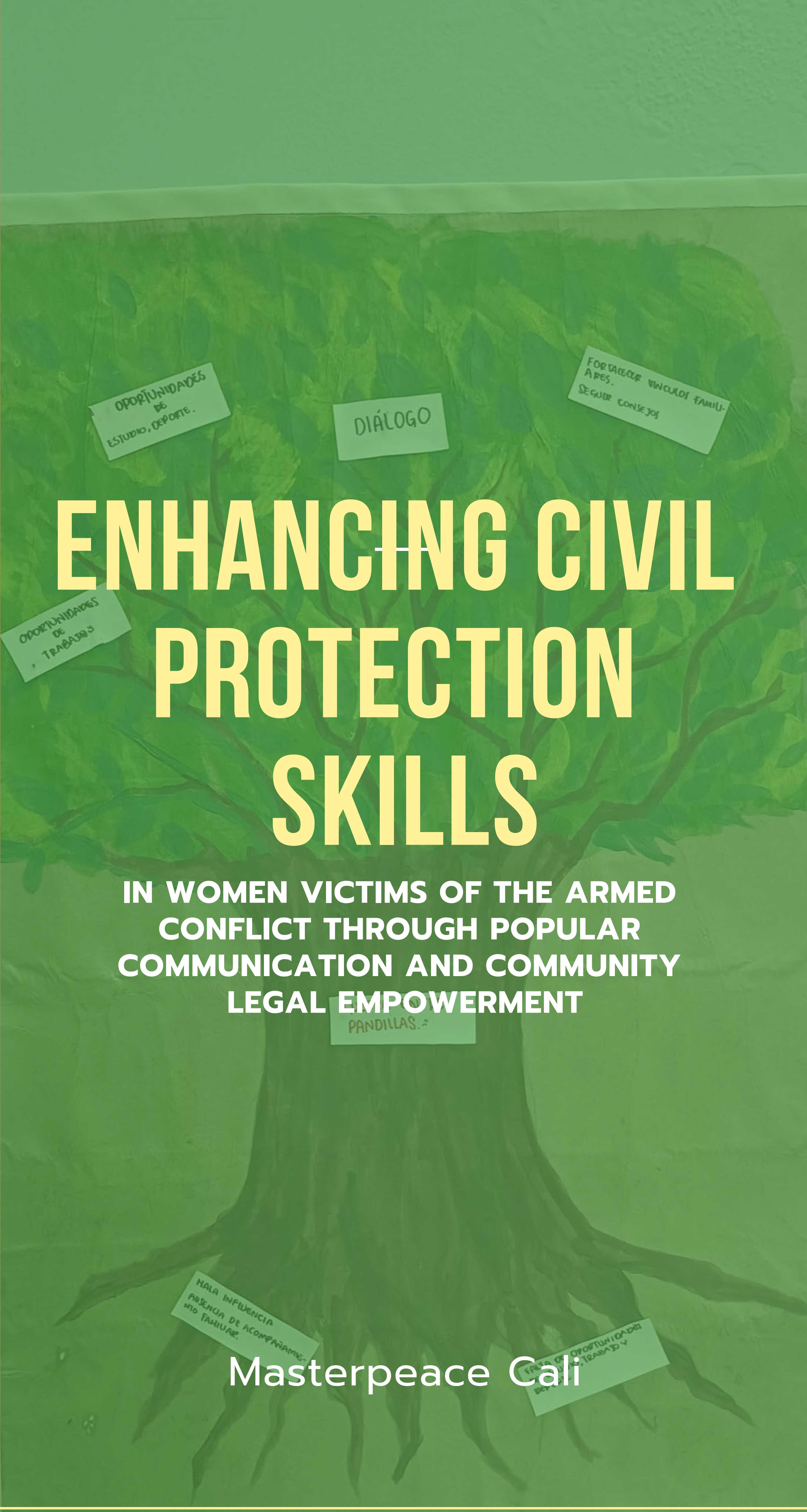




ENHANCING CIVIL PROTECTION SKILLS

IN WOMEN VICTIMS OF THE ARMED
CONFLICT THROUGH POPULAR
COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY
LEGAL EMPOWERMENT

Masterpeace Cali

Project

Enhancing civil protection skills in women victims of the armed conflict through popular communication and community legal empowerment.

Implementing Organization

Masterpeace Cali

Allied Organizations

Fundación Carvajal

Unicatólica Cali

Foro Humanos

Funding

This research was made with the support of the "Creating Safer Space" Network Plus, financed by the Arts and Humanities Research Council of the United Kingdom through the Global Challenges Research Fund.

Lead Researcher

PhD. Luisa María Colonia Zúñiga

MasterLab Research Group – Masterpeace Cali

luisa.colonia@col.masterpeace.org

Co-researcher

PhD. Gustavo Adolfo Suárez Ríos

MasterLab Research Group – Masterpeace Cali

gustavo.suarez@col.masterpeace.org

Research Assistant

Mg. Italia Andrea Agüado Urmendiz

MasterLab Research Group – Masterpeace Cali

italia.aguado@col.masterpeace.org

Photographs / Production Designer/ Museographer

Ingrid Largo - Alejandro Restrepo / Lina Vélez M. / Liliana Cabrera R.

Translated into English by

Denisse Martínez Fernández

Publishing date and place

Santiago de Cali, Colombia

September, 2023

All rights reserved

ISBN 978-958-53578-1-5



UK Research
and Innovation



Fundación Carvajal
Abriéndole caminos a la equidad



ENHANCING CIVIL PROTECTION SKILLS

**IN WOMEN VICTIMS OF THE ARMED
CONFLICT THROUGH POPULAR
COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY
LEGAL EMPOWERMENT**





Scan me for
reading the
English
translation of
the audios in
Spanish



C O N T E N T

PRESENTATION

INTRODUCTION

SEMILLERO DE PAZ LLANO VERDE

METHODOLOGY

Memoir: a community cohesion practice for the UCP
Talking Maps
Epistolary writing

Social cohesion as the foundation for the peaceful defense of
community organization in the field of the UCP
Luisa Maria Colonia Zúñiga

Popular communication and legal empowerment:
strategies for the UCP
Gustavo Adolfo Suárez Ríos

Interaction between unarmed civil self-protection mechanisms
and regulations for the protection of the rights of victims of
armed conflict
Italia Aguado Urmendiz

SOCIAL APPROPRIATION OF KNOWLEDGE

CONCLUSIONS

BIBLIOGRAPHY



Scan me
Research
experience





PRESENTATION

This booklet has been prepared to communicate the key findings of the research project entitled "Enhancing Civil Protection Skills in Women Affected by Armed Conflict through Popular Communication and Community Legal Empowerment." This project was led by Masterpeace Cali with the support of the "Creating Safer Space" Network Plus, financed by the Arts and Humanities Research Council of the United Kingdom through the Global Challenges Research Fund.

Utilizing a qualitative research-action design, the study delved into the experiences in the field of unarmed civil self-protection of a group of women who were displaced by armed conflict and now reside in contexts characterized by social and urban segregation. In these environments, they remain exposed to multiple forms of violence linked to fear-based political dynamics. The research explored the appropriation and implementation of innovative strategies, focusing on community advocacy and storytelling as active participation methods and testimonial resources for collective efforts aimed at promoting social cohesion as the foundation for peaceful community organization.

Through this research, Masterpeace Cali presents an innovative approach to peaceful protection strategies employed by displaced civilian populations in urban areas where violence persists and escalates despite ongoing state conflict resolution processes. Furthermore, by co-creating this booklet with the participating women, we aim to share their positive experiences related to the implementation of these strategies with other communities and grassroots organizations at the local, regional, national, and international levels. Our goal is to encourage the adaptation and replication of these strategies in other regions and communities affected by fear-based policies, thus fostering the exchange of best practices in the field of unarmed civil protection (UCP).

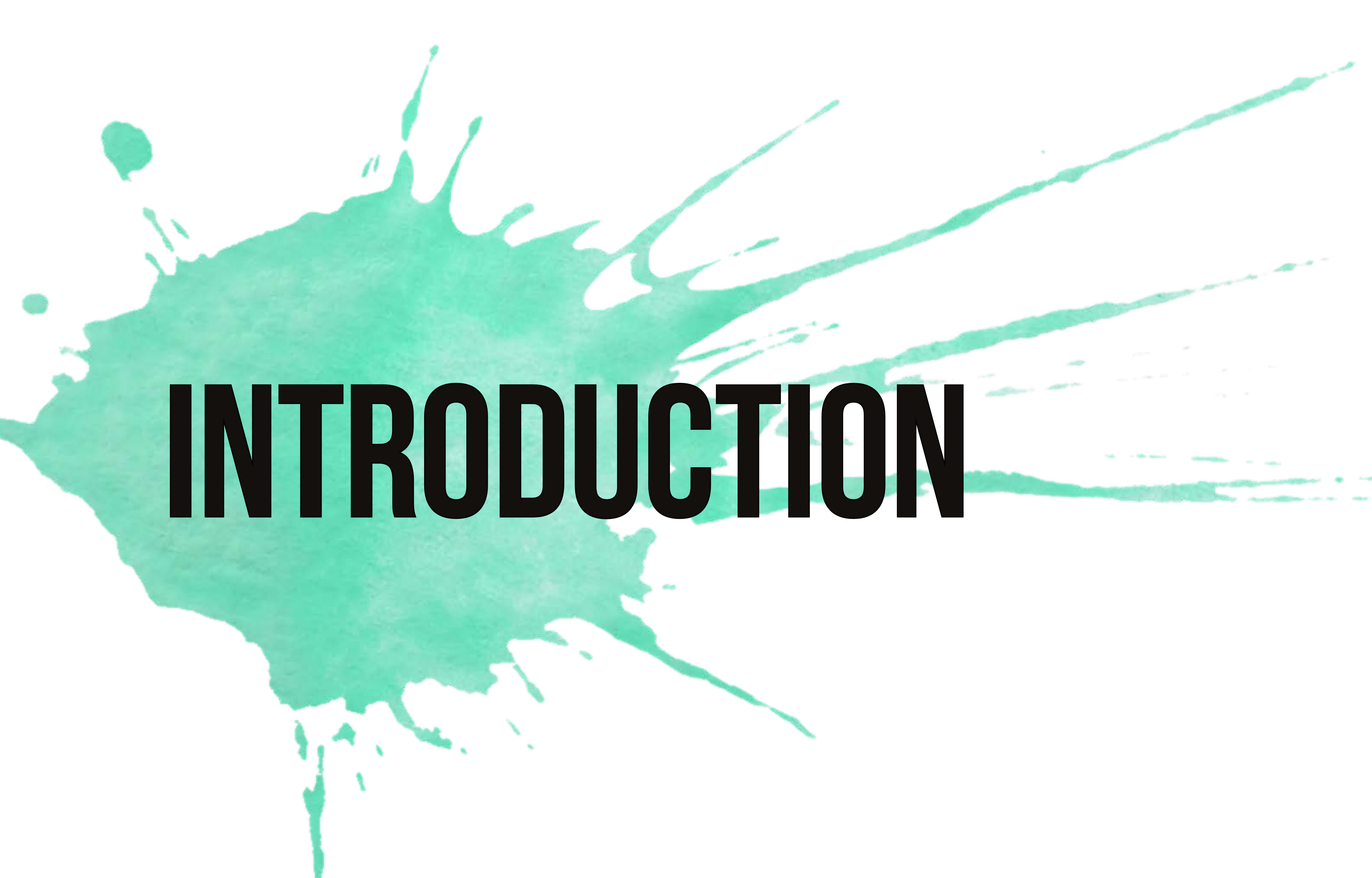
Masterpeace Cali extends heartfelt gratitude to the Llano Verde Peace Seedbed and all research participants for their dedication, support, commitment, and invaluable contributions to the dialogue and co-creation of this booklet. We also urge them to continue strengthening their unarmed civil protection capabilities, which have empowered them to envision and implement processes of peaceful coexistence embedded in community cohesion, with a long-term vision of achieving lasting peace in their territory.

It also expresses its appreciation to the Carvajal Foundation, Humans: the Ibero-American Journalists Forum, and the Legal Clinic of Unicatolica Cali for their partnership and support in making this project visible.

Lastly, Masterpeace Cali extends its profound gratitude to the "Creating Safer Space" Network Plus, the Arts and Humanities Research Council of the United Kingdom, the Global Challenges Research Fund, and Aberystwyth University for their support, which has made this research and the publication of this booklet possible.

**TO SUCCEED, WE
MUST FIRST
BELIEVE THAT
WE CAN.**





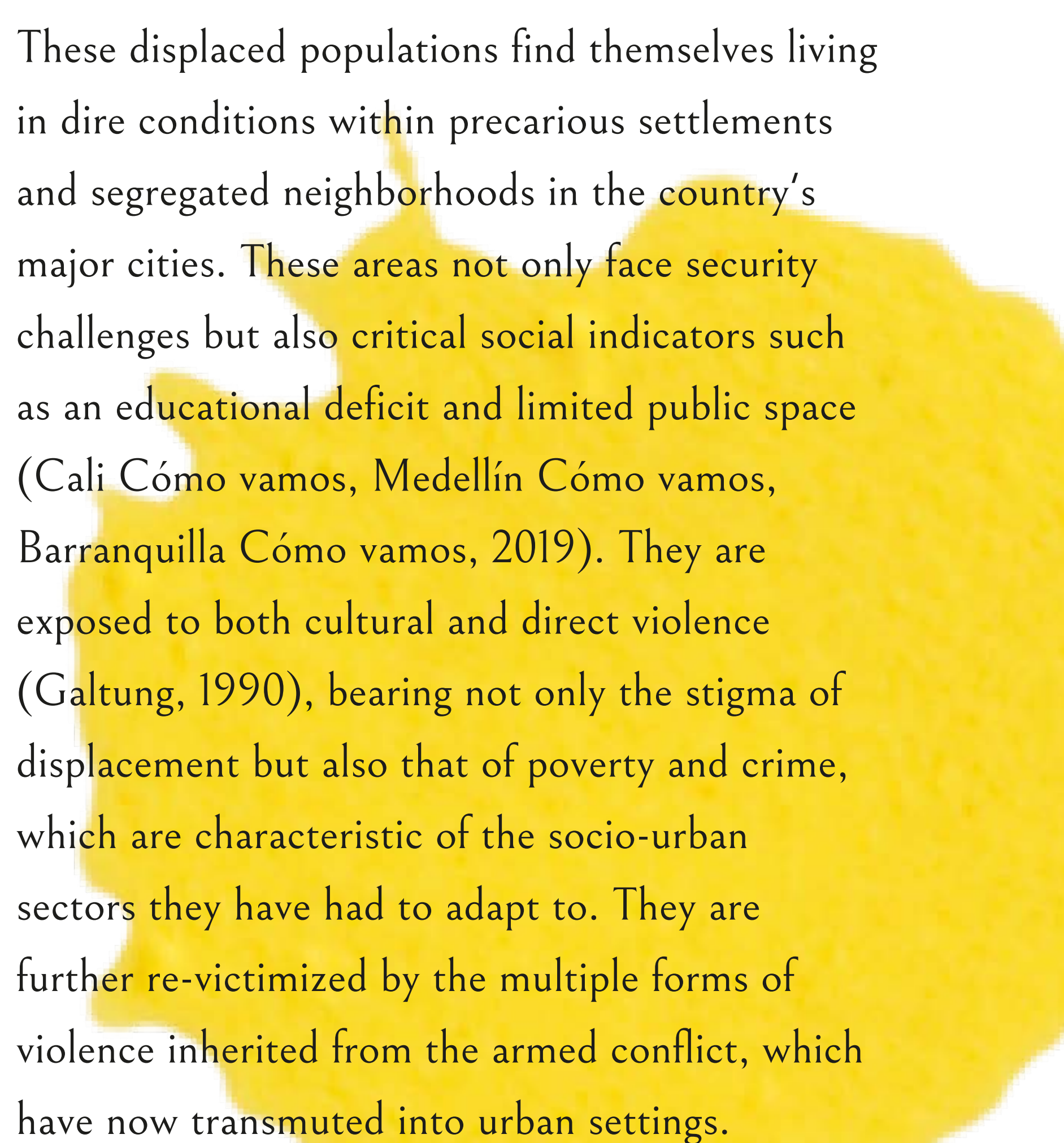
INTRODUCTION

The armed conflict in Colombia, which has persisted for more than 50 years and constitutes the longest active civil war in Latin America, has resulted in an enormous loss of life and numerous violations of human rights. This evidence highlights the erosion of the rule of law. Despite the signing of the Havana Accords in 2016, which initially offered hope for achieving stable and lasting peace in the country, significant challenges still confront Colombians who seek accountability for past abuses and the protection of human rights.

Furthermore, there is the ongoing and worsening of violence, as confirmed by the evolution of organized criminal activities linked to the drug traffic, the targeted killings of social leaders and signatories of the Peace Agreement, the actions of dissident groups from the FARC and the ELN guerrilla, and the shift of armed conflict conditions from rural areas to urban centers (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2021).

In this scenario, there has been a re-victimization of the victims of forced displacement. Approximately 8 million people have been internally displaced in Colombia, according to the State Registry of Victims, and this issue continues to grow.

According to the UN Office for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), in 2021, approximately 73,900 people fell victim to displacement in Colombia, marking a staggering 181% increase compared to 2020. Furthermore, in just the first month of 2022, over 4,400 forcibly displaced individuals were registered, according to the latest report from the Ombudsman's Office.



These displaced populations find themselves living in dire conditions within precarious settlements and segregated neighborhoods in the country's major cities. These areas not only face security challenges but also critical social indicators such as an educational deficit and limited public space (Cali Cómo vamos, Medellín Cómo vamos, Barranquilla Cómo vamos, 2019). They are exposed to both cultural and direct violence (Galtung, 1990), bearing not only the stigma of displacement but also that of poverty and crime, which are characteristic of the socio-urban sectors they have had to adapt to. They are further re-victimized by the multiple forms of violence inherited from the armed conflict, which have now transmuted into urban settings.

In scenarios like these, it has been demonstrated that the efforts of armed security forces – such as the police, national soldiers, or UN Blue Helmets – to ensure the physical safety of civilians are insufficient. This is why non-violent civil self-protection emerges as an alternative approach, described as "...a practice where civilians protect other civilians in situations of imminent, ongoing, or recent violent conflict. These individuals can be trained international civilians safeguarding local civilians, local civilians supporting each other, or even local civilians protecting international or non-local civilians" (Oldenhuis et al., 2021).

In this context, according to the "Creating Safer Space" network, there are over 40 international NGOs and a growing number of national and local organizations actively engaged in protection work across at least 24 conflict-affected countries. Additionally, there are local self-protection initiatives, such as peace communities, employing a range of proactive strategies to establish safer environments for civilian life amidst violent conflicts.

Initial research in this field has suggested that unarmed civil protection (UCP) organizations can often be more effective than armed protection. In fact, recent United Nations Security Council and General Assembly resolutions have highlighted the potential of UCPs, signifying a shift in thinking even within government organizations. However, there is still limited knowledge regarding the non-violent protection offered by UCP-specialized organizations and their connections to community self-protection practices. This is why an important international research collaboration, the "Creating Safer Space" network has been established. Its mission is to contribute to a deeper understanding and support of the protection of unarmed civilians and self-protection in the midst of violent conflict.

In that sense, this project is one of 21 projects financed by the Network in 10 countries. These projects aim to explore three key areas: how to deter or prevent violence against civilians without resorting to the use or threat of force, how to enhance civilian protection capacity, and how to support local efforts in non-violently transforming conflict into a foundation for lasting and sustainable peace with social justice.

Thus, the project title 'Enhancing civil protection skills in women victims of the armed conflict through popular communication and community legal empowerment' aimed to identify the peaceful civil protection capacities among a community of women displaced by the Colombian armed conflict. These women reside in contexts of socio-urban segregation where violence stemming from policies of fear manifests daily. The project sought to achieve this through the synergy of popular communication and community advocacy, addressing the following questions: What happens when social groups or individuals utilize popular communication media to construct their own narratives for peaceful self-protection using civil mechanisms? How does popular communication contribute to reestablishing community bonds and fostering the development of civil self-protection skills? What is the significance of community bonds, promoted through community advocacy, in local and community practices that successfully counter illegal violence through unarmed civil self-protection? And finally, how does the unarmed civil self-protection of the population victimized by the armed conflict and residing in socio-urban segregated contexts interact with the regulations designed to protect the rights of victims, as outlined in the 2016 Peace Agreement?

This project took the form of action-research because it facilitated significant processes for the participants.

It was developed through collaborative methodologies aimed at establishing mechanisms of collaboration and reciprocity with them. Consequently, it introduced approaches that allow us to consider alternative tools for developing civil protection capacities in vulnerable communities and, at the same time, address the ethical pursuit of building knowledge in solidarity with the practice and actions of organizations or social actors.

Working with women who are creators of radio content and knowledge multipliers within their communities allowed us to study how they have integrated and appropriated legal knowledge. This study helped us address our hypothesis regarding the role of popular communication and community advocacy in civil protection and self-protection processes.

In essence, this research serves as a valuable resource for studying community organization led by women. It focuses on peaceful civil self-protection efforts among displaced populations relocated to socio-urban segregation areas. The research presents strategies rooted in memory and testimonies as resources for social cohesion and effective peaceful action by this population in the face of systematic violence and policies of fear.

On the other hand, the co-creation of this booklet as a memory device with the participating population serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it enables the analysis of the impact of popular communication and community advocacy processes. Secondly, it becomes an empowerment tool for the populations involved. The booklet contains a wealth of testimonials that contribute to identity construction. The narratives within it shape the meanings of the experiences and make them transmissible. In essence, testimony is not only valued as an element of identity construction but also as a means of comprehending and socially transmitting the diverse meanings of these experiences.

Consequently, we delve into the conceptualizations that social actors themselves can establish regarding the experiences they narrate. It is understood that within these testimonies, there lies not only the subject of suffering but also the subject of action and resistance (Cacopardo, 2021). Thus, testimony serves as a means to challenge and denaturalize the daily violence experienced by excluded and stigmatized populations or groups. It allows us to explore these resilient experiences and consider alternative perspectives, opening the door to the possibility of replicating best practices in civil protection in other regions and communities that also contend with policies of fear.



Know the
Semillero
de Paz
Llano
Verde



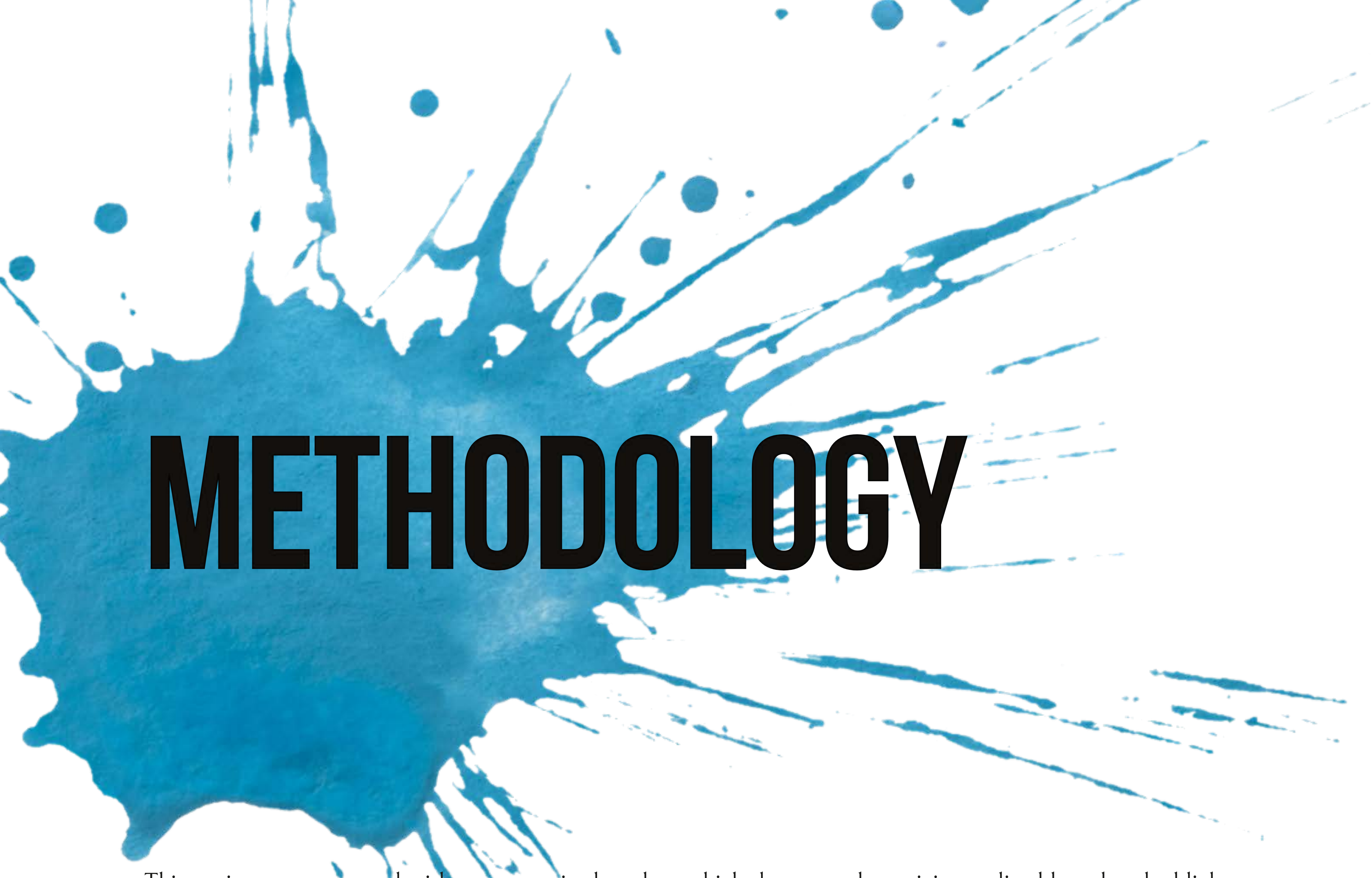
SEMILLERO DE PAZ LLANO VERDE

The grassroots organisation Semillero de Paz de Llano Verde consists of women victims of the armed conflict, defined by Law 1448 of 2011 as those that have suffered damage since January 1, 1985 due to violations of International Humanitarian Law or serious violations of Human Rights in the context of the internal armed conflict.

Semillero de Paz Llano Verde stands as a form of resistance against the new urban violence that re-victimizes families who sought refuge in this neighborhood, fleeing violence in rural areas. This organization initially began its work by providing psychosocial support and access to training programs in human rights and legal empowerment. It does so by acknowledging its members as victims of the conflict based on various collective memory projects that are endorsed through their activities and resistance campaigns. These actions aim to shed light on their struggles for a dignified life and to confront the policies of fear imposed by illegal groups and the public forces as a means of population control.

In other words, this phenomenon represents a form of resistance and empowerment within a marginalized group. They employ specific survival strategies and practices that go beyond mere competition for public spaces. Instead, their efforts are geared towards autonomous construction for the defense of life and territory.

These community resistance processes have been supported by training programs in human rights, which utilize participatory artistic methodologies like theater of the oppressed, as well as popular communication initiatives with a focus on civil rights have been used to amplify the subaltern voices through radio as a platform for citizen participation.



METHODOLOGY

This project was proposed with a community-based research-action approach, utilizing popular communication and community advocacy as participatory methodologies. The primary aim was to establish mechanisms of collaboration and reciprocity with the women who participated in the research, with the objective of co-creating knowledge alongside them.

In this regard, the methodological proposal integrated qualitative research tools commonly employed in social sciences, such as diagnosis, baseline surveys, interviews, focus groups, and participant observation. These tools were used to collect and analyze information regarding the civil self-protection practices developed by the participating women from their training in radio content creation and community advocacy.

Furthermore, an intervention-creation component, based on instruments of Popular Education Pedagogy, was incorporated. This component aimed to facilitate the generation and dissemination of experiences, as well as forms of reading and re-reading. These activities not only contributed to a deeper understanding of the aesthetic, sociocultural, and political contexts in

which the research participants lived but also shed light on the positive experiences they had with the implementation of their civil self-protection practices in their community.

The convergence of these methodologies required the implementation of specific strategies and protocols in each phase of the project. These strategies and protocols incorporated the perspectives of the participants and ensured that the results were addressed to provide continuity to the research process. Ultimately, this comprehensive approach allowed us to develop, validate, and evaluate the new knowledge collaboratively with the women involved in the study.

The project spanned nine months, organized into four stages. In the initial stage, data and information were gathered concerning the demographics of the population and the social bonds formed among community members. Additionally, information was collected about the various forms of violence (physical, emotional, intrafamilial, state) to which they were exposed, as well as their awareness of these issues.

The second stage was dedicated to the analysis and systematization of the information collected in the preceding phase.

Methodology

— This analysis involved the use of hermeneutics, lexicometry, and transcription of the testimonies as analytical tools. The outcomes of this stage included statistical figures, case and actor profiles, and an analysis of the contributing factors. Considering the active role of community women in the studied process, the third stage initiated communication intervention-creation strategies. These women played multiple roles as sources of information (testimonials), content creators, and facilitators simultaneously. Building upon the analysis and systematization of the initial results, intervention activities were designed with the objective of guiding and supporting women in the community in the creation of radio and audiovisual communication pieces related to cases of violation of citizen rights and procedures for resolution or reparation management. While these pieces were based on identified cases, their production necessitated the development of fictional scripts to exemplify and convey the message to a broader audience beyond the geopolitical space in which the research was conducted.

Finally, the fourth stage focused on two aspects: 1. The analysis of the results of the social appropriation of the knowledge derived from the research. 2. The compilation and writing of the final report. While data analysis was an ongoing process throughout the research, this last stage aimed to conduct an assessment of how the material produced was received and its impact, particularly within the community under study. Questions arose such as: What does the community do with the material produced? Are there any changes in community behavior after accessing it? For instance, have there been more complaints or fewer consultations at the legal clinic? It’s important to note that this is an ongoing monitoring exercise that requires long-term observation and assessment.



MEMOIR: A COMMUNITY COHESION PRACTICE FOR THE UCP



The importance of community organization as a mechanism of resistance, understood as a practice of unarmed civil protection against various forms of violence that target women identifying themselves as victims of the internal armed conflict, particularly within the category of forced displacement, is evident in the collective memory exercises conducted by members of the grassroots organization Llano Verde Peace Seedbed. These practices are shaped by an act of self-recognition rooted in their cultural traditions, which helps them transcend the homogenizing identity imposed by victimhood and restores their individuality as citizens. Additionally, there is an element of mutual recognition with others, through which they not only validate their own existence but also foster integrative actions promoting community cohesion as a transformative force from the margins. This allows them to establish a corporeality that, while not permanent, unveils the dynamics at play in the territory and the daily struggles waged underground against neoliberal "governmentality" (Calveiro, 2015).

Discussing the identity intertwined with the territory within an urbanization context of conflict victims, an identity that is linked to collective memory woven from individual narratives that capture the diversity of memories but also the cohesion that these memories foster, serving as testimonies to the unspeakable, to the shared pain and traumas that are yet individually experienced, and to the resistances that manifest as resilience -a tool to navigate toward a return to normalcy after trauma- entails recognizing new voices that emerge from their spectral existence to challenge the rhetoric rooted in the past. This rhetoric continues to shape present-day official discourses, perpetuating and promoting social realities built upon power dynamics between the oppressed and the subaltern.

Those who live on the margins of social exclusion in Latin America not only endure violence within the framework of an accumulation of structural disadvantages, of which they are victims, but also bear the burden of cultural violence stemming from the stigmatization to which they are subjected in the discourses of invisibility.



I These discourses account for a historical culture of privilege enjoyed by dominant sectors of society. This culture is highly significant in the planning, design, and implementation of public policies that not only ignore but also distort social realities and the overlapping dominations experienced by subaltern populations. This quickly reveals a lack of willingness to address and manage these issues, contributing to their persistence, deepening, and eventual normalization to the extent that these populations become spectral: we know they exist, they are there, but we do not see them. In the case of victims of forced displacement who have been marginalized by an exclusive society perpetuating historical structural inequalities, they could be likened to social disappearances—drawing upon the transnationalization of the concept of "disappeared" and its contemporary social applications. This comparison helps us illuminate historical and social contexts that differ significantly from those of the original missing person.

These individuals face ongoing social catastrophes that are compounded by an inadequate interpretation -and collaborative management- of their realities by civil society and State institutions. This renders their existence virtually impossible, even though they do exist (Gatti, 2017).

However, it is through testimony that the disentanglement from spectral existence is accomplished. Thus, one could comprehend that the reinterpretations made by the women of the Peace Seedbed, both of narratives concerning their violent pasts and of categories established to elucidate and classify their interactions with new forms of violence affecting them and their families (which are closely related to the shifting dynamics stemming from the transformation of the Colombian armed conflict from rural to urban settings), become instruments imbued with political significance.

These reinterpretations do not necessarily seek confrontation or power struggles, but they do achieve certain initial victories in terms of security and peaceful protection. This highlights the potency and significance of language in connecting the present with a past marked by the nation's history of conflict, all in pursuit of transforming and pacifying the territory.



TALKING MAPS

Talking maps are deliberate social cartographies of territories created by their inhabitants through an educational exercise. These maps aim to illustrate changes in the living conditions of a community, whether in terms of progress, regression, or stagnation. Simultaneously, this exercise enhances communication skills by leveraging creative abilities, as it brings various perspectives on the same social reality into dialogue for collaborative exploration.

With these principles in mind, we co-created three maps in collaboration with the women of the Llano Verde Peace Seedbed: 1. Colombia Map: This map helps us understand their places of origin from geographical, cultural, and security perspectives. 2. Cali Map: This map pinpoints the locations in the city where they resettled after experiencing forced displacement, allowing us to comprehend the dynamics of these urban spaces in terms of security and protection. 3. Llano Verde Neighborhood Map: Here, we identify the specific territory in which they have settled, and we explore strategies to address and mitigate violence within the community. These strategies are developed in collaboration with grassroots organizations participating in the project, roles within the grassroots organization, and the community as a whole.



COLOMBIA



ANTIOQUIA

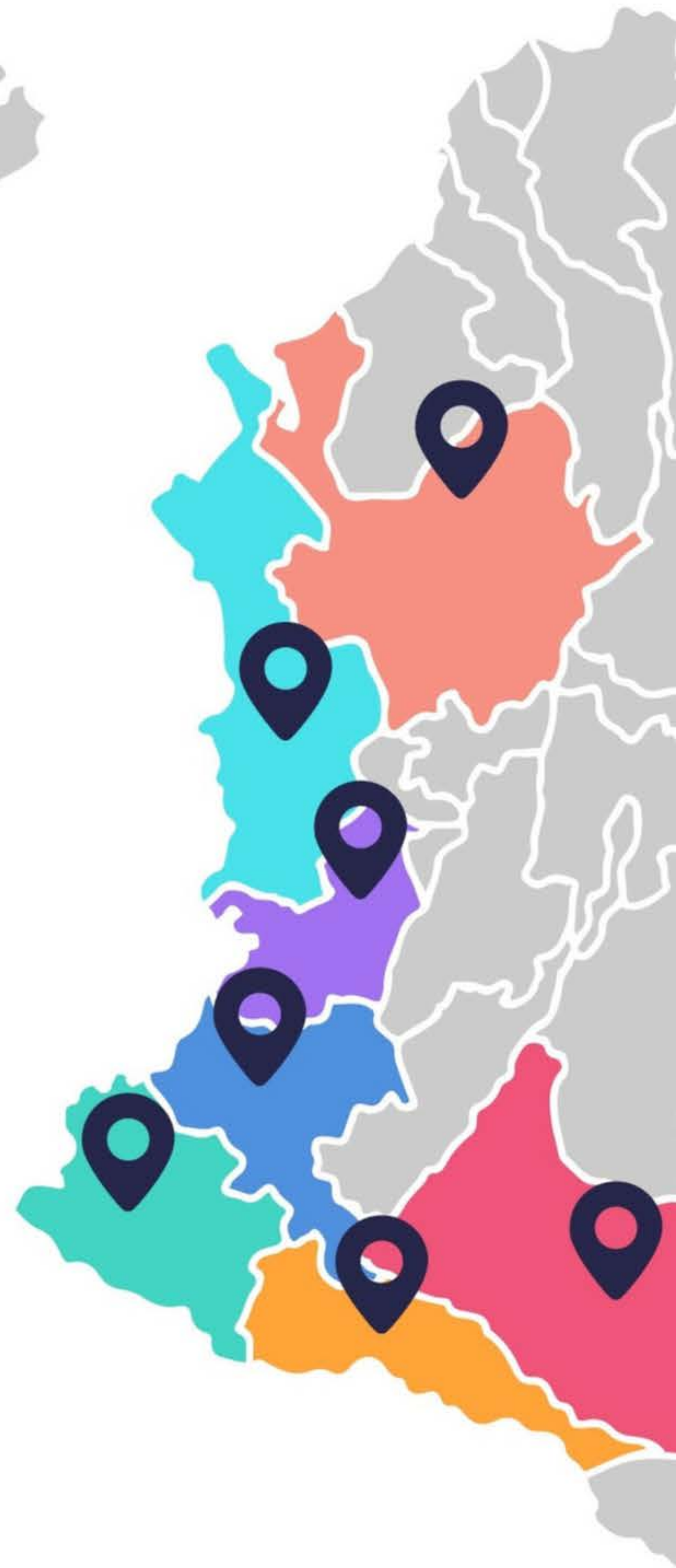
Between November and December 2000, the population of Granada (Antioquia), experienced one of the most intense episodes of recent violence in Colombia. On November 3, the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia carried out a massacre in which 17 people were killed. Then, between December 6 and 7, 2000, the municipality of Granada endured a guerrilla takeover that lasted for 18 hours (National Center of Historical Memory, 2016).

CHOCÓ

Chocó is one of the departments in Colombia where human rights of communities are most often violated, with 70 instances of confinement out of the 89 that occur nationwide, primarily affecting Afro-Colombian and indigenous populations. In 2022 alone, there were 101 forced displacements related to the presence of illegal armed groups such as the ELN and the Clan del Golfo, along with 47 confrontations (Ombudsman's Office, 2022). During April and May of 2016, over 6,000 people fled their homes to escape armed clashes between illegal groups (ACNUR, 2016).

CAUCA

In three decades, approximately four hundred thousand people have experienced forced displacement in the department of Cauca. Since 2009, the department of Cauca has witnessed the highest number of armed actions in Colombia. In 2014, amid the intensity of the conflict, Cauca had half of all the displaced individuals in the country. Between 2009 and 2019, nearly 47,000 people endured mass displacements. Ethnic communities are among the most affected (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2020).





VALLE DEL CAUCA

In Valle del Cauca, all 42 municipalities have experienced forced displacement, with Buenaventura leading at 55.2% of individuals and 49.8% of households displaced in the last decade. It is followed by the southern subregion, which includes Cali and Palmira, with 18.2% of individuals and 20.4% of households affected, with notable impacts in Jamundí, Tuluá, Pradera, and Florida. According to a report by the Paz y Reconciliación Foundation (Pares) and Codhes, 87.8% of victims of the armed conflict in Buenaventura registered between 2017 and 2022 are displaced individuals. In 2022, the Unique Victims Registry (RUV) reported a total of 57,876 victims of forced displacement in Buenaventura over those six years.

NARIÑO

Forced displacement has historically constituted the vast majority, accounting for 81% (432,642 victims), of all victimizing events recorded since the Victims’ Unit began keeping records in 1985 in the department of Nariño. This, combined with the conflict dynamics that emerged after the Peace Agreement, where the war for territorial control and illicit economy revenues has intensified among a multitude of armed actors, has led to forced displacement being the victimizing event that has seen the most significant increase (Fundepaz, 2021).

CAQUETÁ Y PUTUMAYO

Since the 1960s, the departments of Caquetá and Putumayo in Colombia have been hotbeds of activity for illegal armed groups, notably the FARC. Both departments played a crucial role in the expansion and financing of the now-defunct FARC through drug trafficking since 1980. In the last 14 years, these departments have witnessed significant transformations in the Colombian armed conflict, including territorial recovery efforts and military strategies. They have also been the backdrop for conflicts over the control of coca crops and activities related to drug trafficking, involving various armed groups (Fundación Ideas para la Paz, 2014).

CALI



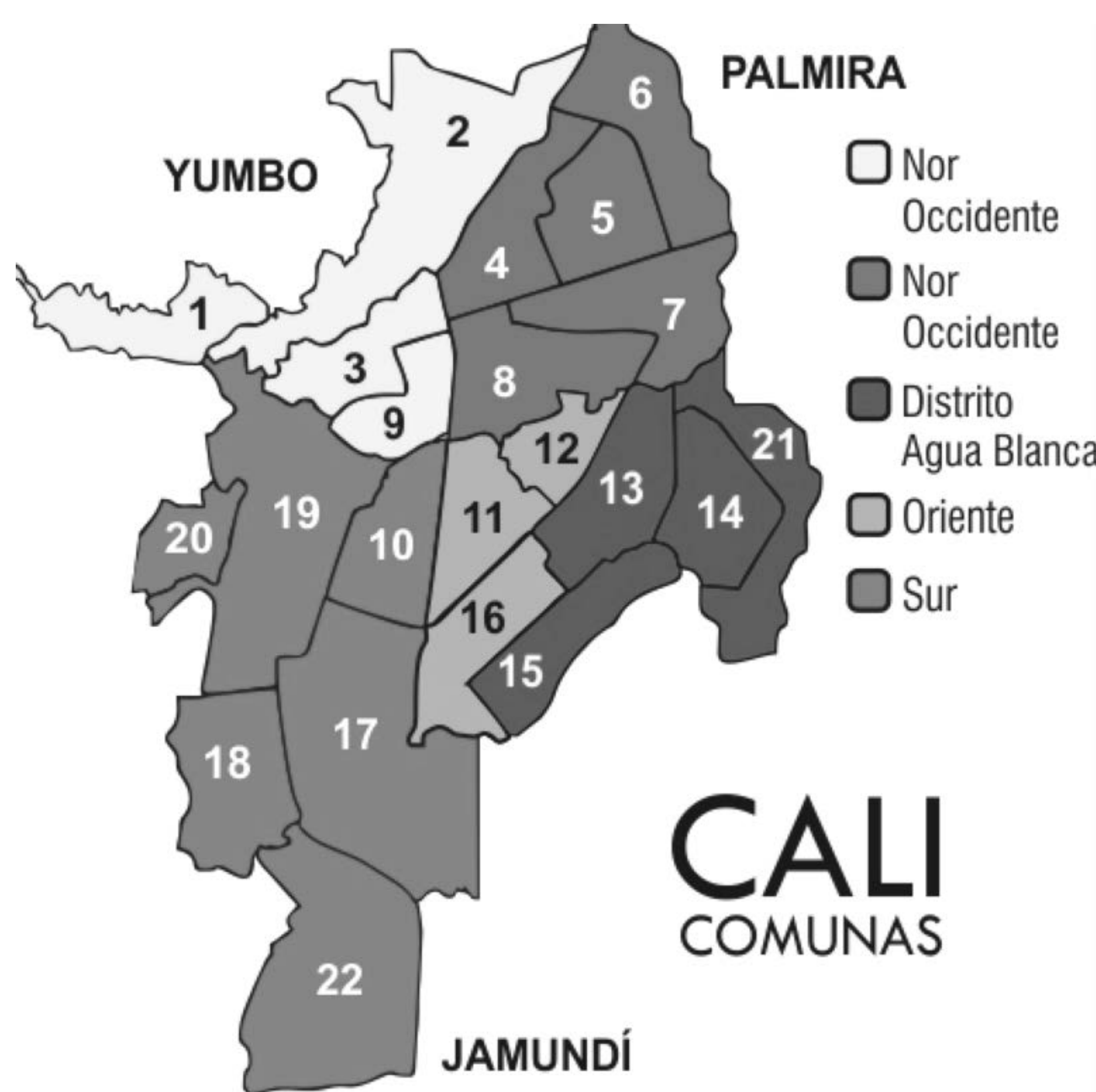
Since the mid-1990s, Colombia has witnessed the reemergence of forced displacement with unwavering intensity. At the heart of this multifaceted crisis, Cali, the nation's third most populated city, has become a beacon of hope for thousands of displaced individuals from southwestern Colombia, primarily from the Pacific coast.

The migratory influx has been driven by factors such as poverty, regional development imbalances, natural disasters, and the escalating violence in these regions.

In Cali, as in other major cities across the country, displaced populations tend to settle in patterns of dispersed communities in peripheral neighborhoods and districts characterized by higher levels of poverty, social deficits, and urban segregation (Vidal et al., 2013).

Notably, the Aguablanca District in the city's east stands out, where a substantial concentration of displaced individuals is observed in communes 21, 15, 14, and 13. These communes experience heightened challenges related to poverty, unmet basic needs, multidimensional poverty, and violence (Administrative Planning Department, 2019).

This suggests that displaced individuals arriving in Cali face significant difficulties not only due to limited resources and opportunities in these areas, which expose them to precarious living conditions and increased vulnerability to exploitation but also due to elevated levels of violence persisting in these environments.



Moreover, they often encounter discrimination and stigma from host communities. Furthermore, there is the emergence of urban violence phenomena, leading to new displacements within cities, driven by armed conflict actors and organized crime groups.

LLANO VERDE

Llano Verde is a neighborhood that is part of the 100,000 free homes program initiated by the national government in 2012. This program was established through Law 1537 of the same year and was classified as a Housing Project of Priority Interest. It was implemented within the framework of Law 1448 of 2011, also known as the Victims and Land Restitution Law.

In the process of developing this urbanization, 4,319 families were relocated. Among these families, 3,521 were victims of the armed conflict, particularly those who had experienced forced displacement. The remaining 798 families originated from the Jarillón settlements along the Cauca River. They were also beneficiaries of the same housing project, as they were a population affected by the winter wave, as reported by Santiago de Cali Town Hall in 2015.

Today, Llano Verde housing complex is home to over 20,000 people from various regions, including Antioquia, Chocó, Nariño, Cauca, Valle, Putumayo, and Caquetá. This initiative represents a significant effort by the government to provide housing and support to individuals and families affected by armed conflict and natural disasters.

The Llano neighborhood is located in the Commune 15 of the Aguablanca District, situated to the east of the city. It is an impoverished urban area with high rates of violence, housing approximately 30% of Cali's population, of which 68% are of African descent (DANE, 2018).

The origin of this district in the 1960s is rooted in a combination of vulnerable rural and urban regional

migrations, and it continues to grapple with patterns of urban segregation and exclusion. Inequality, as a form of relative poverty, is associated with higher levels of violence. In 2004, 26% of the total deaths reported in Cali were residents of Aguablanca. However, between 2014 and 2019, this percentage increased to over 40% each year. Furthermore, the district is characterized by the most severe poverty conditions in the city and substantial social disparities in relation to the longitudinal area (CIDSE, 2019).

In the context of extreme inequality and serious injustices, Llano Verde Peace Seedbed was founded in 2016. It is a grassroots organization primarily composed of women who are victims of the Colombian armed conflict. This organization serves as a form of resistance against the new urban violence that re-victimizes families who had sought refuge in this neighborhood, fleeing from their perpetrators in rural areas.

In their new territory, which they defend peacefully, they identify the sources of insecurity that affect them the most. These sources are typically found in the main parks of this urban area. To address these challenges and as a peaceful civil protection tactic, they have developed the "Corners of Peace" program. Through this program, they create safe spaces for children, adolescents, and young people using traditional games that draw upon the cultural diversity that unites them. These spaces serve to protect these individuals from violence promoted by gangs and other criminal groups.





EPISTOLARY WRITING

Epistolary writing provides a platform for spontaneously recounting everyday events that have a significant impact on people's lives. This allows the author to highlight details considered relevant and, consequently, prioritize them over those that hold no value in the context of the narrative. This form of communication facilitates a more authentic understanding of the situations and environments experienced by populations.

When this methodology is employed in community exercises, it is essential to focus on a specific, contextualized topic that reflects the desired information. However, it is also crucial to encourage a feedback process among participants rather than limiting it to one-way communication between the facilitator and participants. This approach promotes equal participation, enabling an organic exchange of data without direct facilitator intervention, except in the subsequent analysis of the collected information.

As part of our active participation methodology, we engaged the women of the Llano Verde Peace Seedbed in reflecting on the most prevalent issues of violence in their community.

We also tasked them with identifying the institutions responsible for providing effective solutions to these problems through a community advocacy exercise. Subsequently, we encouraged them to compose letters addressed to the representatives of these institutions. In these letters, they described the cases, urged the authorities to take measures within the framework of the democratic State, and offered recommendations based on their experiences in the community. The goal was to ensure that the proposed solutions were not only effective but also sustainable. At the conclusion of this exercise, the participants assumed the role of decision-makers and responded to the letters they had “received”.

In this way, we were able to observe that this group of women possesses a profound understanding of both the functioning of State institutions and their responsibilities towards citizens. This led us to the conclusion that they not only know whom to contact to demand compliance with their rights and protection but also comprehend the solutions that these institutions can provide within the legal framework.

San tía jo de cali
unio =16 del 2023

dia! Saludo;
estimado, Re

Motivo de es
obre la indenn
16 pero est
da

eso me bi en la obligación de escribirle esta car

oro tener una
riendo encun
sotros como
su lugar: yo

baJaria para que todos Resivieran ese benefi

Has pronto
en tan que e
r la Atención
uy Agra de cica;



rmación
a desde el
an solucio

ya
que nos ref
s Victima.

AS
orta le que

SOCIAL COHESION AS THE FOUNDATION FOR THE PEACEFUL DEFENSE OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION IN THE FIELD OF THE UCP

By Luisa Maria Colonia Zúñiga

What is the importance of community bonds, promoted by community advocacy, in the local and community practices that manage to overcome illegal violence through unarmed civil self-protection?

Introduction

Unarmed civil self-protection (UCP) is a strategy in the field of security and human protection that has emerged in response to illegal violence affecting marginalized communities and victims of armed conflict in areas where violence still persists, and where public forces cannot guarantee their safeguarding. These acts of violence, often perpetrated by criminal groups and illegal armed actors, have created an atmosphere of fear and vulnerability in many rural communities. These communities have been forced to migrate to urban areas, where they encounter social contexts marked by both direct and cultural violence (Galtung, 1990), ultimately re-victimizing them and subjecting them to a state of spectral existence (Gatti, 2017). This spectral existence is anchored in the premise that forced displacement can be understood as a dynamic of social disappearance.

This is the case of the grassroots organization "Llano Verde Peace Seedbed" primarily composed of victims of forced displacement. The Seedbed was founded in 2016 in the Llano Verde neighborhood – a housing development built by the national government to relocate conflict victims who settled in Cali. It emerged as a form of peaceful resistance from the margins in response to the new urban violence identified in the area (inherited from conflict in rural zones) that was beginning to re-victimize the community.

Their resistance was built upon the constant exercise of collective memory, allowing them to initiate processes of healing from traumas caused by the violent experiences they endured during the armed conflict – even while living in a highly violent urban environment. It also enabled them to create and strengthen social cohesion bonds with the goal of establishing a robust community organization that provided them with a sense of corporeal identity (detaching them from spectral existence).



This resistance gradually took root and grew stronger through the collaborative construction of narratives surrounding their resilience and experiences related to the assertion of their civil rights. These narratives were transformed into testimonies through the use of radio tools as facilitators of community advocacy, with community bonds being an essential part of this process. In doing so, they managed to establish an environment of peaceful protection from the margins.

In this analysis, we will delve into the details of how the construction and strengthening of social cohesion through collective memory in a community advocacy exercise plays a crucial role in the peaceful resistance and unarmed civil self-protection promoted by Semillero de Paz Llano Verde.

The Social Disappeared in the Context of Neoliberal Governmentality

According to Pilar Calveiro (2018), governmentality is a specific form of exercising power that manifests in the relationships woven among individuals, groups, and entities. In this regard, in neoliberalism where the nation-state no longer holds exclusive power but rather it is "contested" by other organizations that can be supranational and/or local, and where the boundaries between legality and illegality have blurred to make way for policies of fear aimed at territorial and population control; governmentality is revealed as a network woven by multiple powers that constantly overlap and contests hegemony.

A network that encompasses the State but surpasses it, almost impossible to defeat because it permeates politics, law enforcement, and the State itself, while also connecting with drug trafficking networks and other illegal practices. In this sense, this network, in turn, is responsible for making the "nobodies" invisible -those who exist in a spectral state within society because they have been excluded from the protection of the law as subjects of rights. In other words, they have been concealed within uniform masses where individuals fade into obscurity. This occurs not only due to the actions of illegal mafia terror but also because of the State itself, which has relegated them to precarious lives, hidden under the rug, turning a blind eye to them and disregarding them as citizens.

The social phenomena within this governmentality scenario, resulting from power dynamics and disputes, have prompted the consideration of an expanded concept of "missing persons," one that encompasses the socially disappeared. This expansion entails more than just their inclusion in the realm of memory studies for individuals denied, disconnected, and estranged from their identity as citizens (Gatti, 2017). It aims to lift them from their spectral state, giving them recognition and acknowledgment, thus dignifying their status as human rights subjects. Furthermore, it opens up the possibility of shedding light on forms of resistance through the lens of memory within subaltern social movements, which can be associated with the notion of the socially disappeared, as they often inhabit everyday social catastrophes. These movements, though operating from the margins, occasionally surface within the sphere of governmentality.



In essence, it is proposed that the socially disappeared can temporarily acquire a sense of corporeality through what we recognize as an unarmed civilian protection (UCP) endeavor, driven by the way they utilize their testimonies as a manifestation of collective memory, activated as a mechanism of resistance within the framework of community advocacy. This fleeting corporeal presence becomes woven into the web of power dynamics, albeit briefly yet effectively, leading to some achievements in terms of protection and civil security, grounded in the assurance of their rights being met. However, this transformation can only occur when they are enveloped within the fabric of community cohesion; outside of this, the socially disappeared reverts to their spectral and unprotected status.

Forced displacement as a dynamic of social disappearance

According to data from the Administrative Department of Planning and the RUV (Single Registry of Victims; Registro Único de Víctimas in Spanish), the majority of the Colombian population registered as victims of displacement within the context of the armed conflict are thrust by neoliberal governmentality into pockets of poverty in urban areas. Here, they endure new forms of violence no longer linked to conflict dynamics in rural regions but associated with the dynamics of social exclusion and invisibility prevalent in cities. These cities are marked by zoning divisions driven by criteria of segregation, which often relate to racial categorizations of poverty and violence. In simpler terms, this new social status of those forcibly displaced disrupts their individual development, impacting critical aspects of their civil and political rights (similar to the disruption of capability development or progress). This deprivation prevents them from enjoying a decent standard of living and consequently confines them to a spectral existence on the fringes of society.

That is to say, those living on the margins of social exclusion not only endure violence as a result of an accumulation of structural disadvantages to which they fall victim but also bear the burden of cultural violence stemming from their stigmatization as subjects in discourses of invisibility. These discourses perpetuate a historical culture of privilege enjoyed by dominant sectors of society and play a significant role in the planning and implementation of public policies. These policies not only overlook but also distort social realities and the overlapping oppressions experienced by subaltern populations. It becomes apparent that there is a lack of willingness to address and manage these issues, contributing to their persistence, deepening, and eventual normalization to the extent that these populations become spectral: we know they exist, that they are there, but we do not see them.

In light of these ideas, we can assert that victims of forced displacement, who have been marginalized by an exclusive society, are grappling with a dynamic of social disappearance. This concept draws upon the transnationalization of the "disappeared" category and its novel social applications. It helps us shed light on historical and social circumstances that are markedly different from those of the original "disappeared" individuals. They are experiencing everyday social catastrophes that are perpetuated and intensified due to a flawed understanding and joint management of their realities by both civil society and State institutions in their quest to ensure protection and security. This situation renders their existence impossible, even if they technically exist (Gatti, 2017).

Community bonds as the foundation for UCP

The significance of community organization as a means of resistance and protection against various forms of violence targeting women who identify themselves as victims of the internal armed conflict, particularly within the context of forced displacement, becomes evident in the collective memory practices undertaken by members of the grassroots organization Semillero de Paz Llano Verde. These practices are influenced by self-recognition grounded in their cultural traditions, which distinguishes them from the collective identity imposed on victims, blurring their individuality as citizens. Additionally, they involve recognizing others, not only affirming their own existence but also that of fellow community members in inclusive actions that prioritize community cohesion as a transformative force from the margins. This enables them to establish a corporeality that, while not permanent, reveals the daily dynamics of unarmed civil self-protection that persist in the territory amidst policies aimed at instilling fear and controlling the population.

Discussing unarmed civil self-protection in this case implies acknowledging that it becomes possible through the establishment of an identity intertwined with the territory, which serves as an urbanization for conflict victims. This identity is fostered through popular culture and communication efforts centered around collective memory. This collective memory is constructed from individual narratives that reflect the diversity of memories, but it also highlights the cohesion that this diversity facilitates. These narratives serve as testimonies, touching upon the unspeakable, pain, and traumas, even though they are individual experiences, they are also shared. They also shed light on present-day resistance, which is explained through community advocacy practices as a means of safeguarding their rights.



In this regard, Piper et al. (2013) point out that since memory is a cultural production, it would be symbolically defined and closely linked to language. Therefore, one could understand that the reinterpretations that the women of Semillero de Paz make, both of stories about their violent pasts and the categories created to explain and typify their relationships – as well as their peaceful response – to the new violence affecting them and their families, could be viewed as tools imbued with political significance. These tools may not necessarily seek direct confrontation or dispute over power but rather the attainment of certain early victories related to security and civil protection aspects. In this context, one can discern the strength and importance of language usage, connecting the present with a past marked by the national history of conflict and the existence of a Political Constitution in a State governed by the rule of law, in their pursuit of transforming and pacifying their territory.

Final Considerations

Memory has been established within the Llano Verde Peace Seedbed organization as a political form of identity. It offers a wealth of testimonials that serve as a clear manifestation of identity construction. These narratives are where the meanings of their experiences take shape, and they are what make these experiences transmissible. In other words, testimony should be appreciated not only as a means of constructing identity but also as a way of comprehending and socially transmitting the numerous facets of experience. From this perspective, it becomes evident that social actors themselves can formulate conceptualizations concerning the experiences they narrate. It is important to recognize that within these testimonies, there is not only the subject of suffering but also the subject of action and resistance (Cacopardo, 2021).

The construction and reinforcement of social cohesion through collective memory and community advocacy are crucial elements in the peaceful resistance and unarmed civil self-protection promoted by Llano Verde Peace Seedbed. These strategies enable the community to heal from traumas, reaffirm their identity, and advocate for their rights in the face of a hostile environment.

This occurs because collective memory serves not only as a healing process but also as a tool of resistance, challenging the invisibility and silence imposed by society. Community advocacy transforms these narratives into tangible actions that bring injustices to light and seek solutions with a degree of autonomy from the margins.

Thus, the case of the Semillero de Paz Llano Verde illustrates how new empowerment strategies, grounded in memory and testimony, serve as a resource for social cohesion as a crucial foundation for effective peaceful self-protection. These strategies have the potential to transform spectral existence into active resistance and ensure security amidst systematic violence and policies of fear. The insights gained from these strategies provide valuable lessons on how marginalized communities can resist and protect themselves in contexts of violence and exclusion. They also offer the potential for replicating these best practices in other regions and communities that similarly endure government violence.

POPULAR COMMUNICATION AND LEGAL EMPOWERMENT: STRATEGIES FOR THE UCP

By Gustavo Adolfo Suárez Ríos

The development of Phase 1 of the intervention is designed, taking into account the specific objectives of the research. The analysis of popular communication is based on the following specific objective: to describe the relationship between popular communication and community legal empowerment for civil protection, from the paradigm of conflict transformation from below promoted by John Paul Lederach."

Based on this objective, two initial research questions are formulated to guide the process:

A. How does popular communication participate in the reestablishment of community ties and the development of civil self-protection capabilities?

B. What happens when social groups or actors appropriate popular media and construct their own narratives for peaceful self-protection through civil mechanisms?

For the analysis of data, information, and evidence collected in field and archival work, categories are defined to allow for the consideration of popular communication practices, their understanding, and their interaction with other processes such as legal empowerment. From this perspective, the analysis begins by questioning the participating population's understanding of three central notions: popular communication, legal empowerment, and the construction of peace processes.

In a second phase, we focus on the way in which these three notions are articulated in the community's practices. Finally, to advance the analysis, a series of guiding questions are formulated to facilitate a deeper study of the non-armed protection and self-protection processes undertaken by the members of the Llano Verde community, particularly the Semillero de Paz Foundation.



From News to Information

The Transformation of the Definition of Communication Within the Community

The principle of information is to contribute to decision-making. In this sense, data must evolve from being mere news to becoming a social tool. In the case of the Peace Seedbed community in Llano Verde, the experiences of the association members are utilized to create a podcast series that delves into the violence the community has endured. This exploration spans their life in a rural area to their residency in the neighborhood of Commune 15 in Cali, encompassing various displacement processes, including within the city. This intervention and creation process empowers the Foundation's community to reclaim their life stories, share them, and collectively construct a repository and source of information.

The members of the Foundation, particularly the women who constitute it, recognize the value of their stories as examples and valuable information for themselves and other community members. Through the process of creating a podcast, they manage to liberate their voices and express their opinions and perspectives about their neighborhood, their community, and the types of violence they have directly experienced or witnessed.

However, a comparative analysis between the audiovisual testimonies recorded as part of the memory collection during the intervention-creation process and the opinions expressed during the fieldwork conducted with them in the first phase of the project reveals an evolving understanding of the value and nature of information and communication. While the majority of participants mentioned radio and television broadcasts, the work of Phase 1 allows us to confirm that their comprehension of the social, cultural, and political dimensions of communication and information is still limited.

Initially, the participants' discourse regarding information is directly linked to news, i.e., to novelty.

Some even question why they should discuss their cases and experiences when "that already happened."

However, within the context of creating the podcasts, participants like Sonia and Bertha shift their focus to the significance of these audio pieces in terms of visibility for their cases within the community. Although we are now dealing with an understanding of data as information and a tool, its interpretation remains largely centered on individual utility. In this sense, the podcast is perceived as a platform for showcasing experiences and life stories, which are deemed relevant to their "protagonists".

In a subsequent phase, as part of the focus groups during Phase 1 of the project, we conducted a listening activity involving one of the podcast episodes with the women of the Foundation. Once again, collective reflection begins with the recognition of the individual and the empowering value of sharing their stories. Listening to the audio production allows us to delve into the nature of communication and information within the community.

The insights shared by participants such as Norma, the leader of the foundation, and Madeleine, one of its most active members, further our understanding of the collective significance of storytelling and reflection on personal experiences. They emphasize that these experiences serve as valuable tools for decision-making among other community members. Their input enhances our understanding of sound production, not merely as the presentation of anecdotes or experiences, but as the creation of valuable information for the community.

The definition and intricate understanding of communication and information as tools for social construction are currently evolving within the Peace Seedbed Foundation community in Llano Verde. Communication practices, such as podcasting, play a role in this ongoing construction process, which begins at the individual level and gradually evolves into a collective endeavor.



Popular communication practices: From traditional media consumption to content creation

To understand how popular communication is configured in this space, it is necessary to analyze the practices and activities of the members of the Semillero de Paz Foundation. We begin with the definition of popular communication as a process of cultural, social, and political synthesis involving the community. This approach to communication is based on creating a network among community members. It goes beyond simply promoting access to data and the circulation of information; it is about forging connections and interactions among them. In the case of the Peace Seedbed Foundation, communication takes place in simple, everyday spaces such as the community kitchen, the garden, and weekly meetings between participants. These activities allow us to share information that is relevant and important to the community.

In this case, communication is not mediated by technological tools for extended recording over time (such as video cameras, recorders, or cell phones), and it does not aim for widespread dissemination beyond the Foundation's spaces and collective meetings. However, we can consider the activities of the community kitchen and the women's meeting 'Healing Wounds' as the initial communication practices with a popular approach. These activities foster the creation of a network in which the citizen plays a central role, not only as a recipient but also as a sender-producer of information. This information is conveyed through both verbal and non-verbal language and originates from local, domestic, and community contexts, immediately relevant to other community members.

From the perspective of popular communication, we can view these activities as practices that promote a sense of belonging, which is a foundational principle of this approach. The spaces for dialogue among participants encourage the exchange of experiences, leading to the recognition of both the 'other' and the 'self' within an alterity that fosters cohesion and facilitates the flow of information and social construction.

In this context, the women in the association identify themselves as integral members of a cultural, social, and even political 'collective.' However, it's important to note that this process is limited to women. Despite efforts to involve other members of the community, the participation of young people and men remains limited.

Self-recognition, another characteristic of popular communication, is cultivated among community members based on the principle of acknowledging 'otherness.' They develop and transform their self-representations through interactions and dialogues with other members of the Foundation. In this perspective, the information that circulates contributes to the construction of a collective identity.

It's worth noting the uniqueness of this process within the Peace Seedbed Foundation. Initially, the projects targeted adolescents, considering them as victims, targets, and actors of violence in the community. However, the proposal evolved to account for the enthusiasm and activism of the women in the community. This transformation marks the beginning of the configuration of the identity principle, which is essential in popular communication processes. It emerges from a process of redefinition and reclaiming social, gender, and generational factors related to women who have experienced forced displacement and various forms of violence. Moreover, while the Foundation is open to the entire community, it's primarily women over 40 who actively participate.

The participants' discourse reveals the construction of a collective identity grounded in terms and concepts associated with the family as the primary social structure. Norma, the leader, is described by others as a kind of 'mother' who looks after the well-being of the children and other members. Similarly, they perceive the Foundation as a home and a meeting point.



Furthermore, in their speeches, it's evident how the peasant, indigenous, or Afro-descendant origins of the Foundation members transform from factors of marginalization into strengths that foster the unity of these women. Concepts like empowerment, feminism, resilience, and resignification are recurrently used, demonstrating an exercise in reclaiming and empowering the community. They establish a shared space where a collective social stance and interpretation of reality are embraced.

Now, if the process of constructing a collective identity unfolds within the framework of direct and face-to-face exchange activities, it facilitates the appropriation of communication tools and the management of information through platforms like WhatsApp groups. It also encourages participation in the creation of communication products, such as the podcast series proposed by the Masterpeace Cali organization.

In the implementation of these two projects, a noticeable transformation occurs within the community, particularly among the women of the Foundation. They transition from being consumers of traditional media, such as radio broadcasts, to become content producers that closely resonate with the issues affecting the community. In the case of the podcast, topics like sexual harassment, domestic violence, institutional violence, and life stories related to forced displacement processes are addressed. Women not only participate as primary sources but also as creators, sharing and presenting their personal narratives.

In the context of the WhatsApp group, the information that circulates primarily revolves around institutional and legal procedures directly relevant to the Foundation's members and the community's life.

While the testimonies of only three participants, including the Foundation's director, emphasize the significance of media in shaping society, all members underscore the importance of sharing the experiences of the sector's residents as a reporting tool and a means to connect with others who have experienced or are currently experiencing similar situations. Implicitly, they recognize the role of information in decision-making. They highlight that learning about other cases can lead to finding solutions and preventing the recurrence of violent situations.

The discourse of the women reveals a centralization of information, not only within State institutions but also within the Foundation and its leadership, which complicates decision-making and the actions of its members. Faced with this situation, the women propose the development of information dissemination tools, at least within the Foundation, to, on one hand, relieve the leader from the burden of 'solving everything,' and on the other hand, to grant greater autonomy to each and every member.

In this perspective, a social network is established, in the sense that Bruno Latour (1980) describes it: citizens shift from being mere agents who react to external stimuli to taking on the role of actors capable of initiating actions and influencing both human actors (fellow citizens) and non-human actors (institutions).

The actions and communication practices guided by the popular approach encourage the participation of all Foundation members. Within this context, we can consider the development of horizontal relationships among community members. This horizontal dynamic fortifies the community, enabling it to establish more robust vertical connections with State institutions and, equally, with groups operating outside the law that could impact the living conditions in the area.

Popular communication is a powerful tool for legal empowerment and for strengthening peacebuilding and conflict resolution processes

In the case of Llano Verde, the popular communication practices carried out by the members of the Peace Seedbed Llano Verde organization serve as a tool for the unarmed self-protection processes within the community. In the context of conflict transformation and peace consolidation, as proposed by John Paul Lederach (2003), it's based on developing relationships among stakeholders initially on a horizontal level. Subsequently, it addresses vertical interactions from the grassroots level. This means that the community directly affected by the conflict engages in dialogue among its members and formulates potential transformation strategies that need to be discussed with State institutions - considered non-human actors according to Latour (1980) - to bring about effective changes. In this perspective, to the formula for change devised with the Peace Seedbed Llano Verde organization, we must incorporate legal support, along with the community advocacy practices of Masterpeace Cali.

Fieldwork and the analysis of archival materials confirm that popular communication plays a role in creating spaces for dialogue and interaction. These spaces range from horizontal interactions among community members to vertical engagement with institutions like the Police, the Government, and the National Victims Program.

Additionally, legal support enhances the process by providing legal tools to empower the community, enabling them to engage in civil self-protection against acts of violence.

The demographic conditions of the sector lead to various forms of violence experienced by the community. Both direct speech and the testimonies collected in the audio recordings reveal instances of harassment by non-lawful groups and even by institutions like the police. These types of violence are distinctly different. The first involves threats of forced recruitment or even death, while the latter entails constant surveillance and a lack of support. Participants in the focus groups and group interviews unanimously report that some police officers intimidate them, fostering fear instead of a sense of safety and protection.

In addition to these visible forms of violence, there are less overt but equally perilous issues, including stigmatization and neglect by State entities. For instance, the women of the Foundation describe the challenges they face in obtaining institutional recognition as a population in a situation of displacement or as victims of the armed conflict, along with the associated economic compensation.

Faced with the problems of the sector, the Peace Seedbed organization acts as an articulating entity for the community. Most of the participants share the situation of displacement and relocation in the sector. Some are homeowners, and others are tenants. They emphasize the cultural diversity of the neighborhood as a strength because it allows the convergence of knowledge from different areas of the country. However, they also attribute the origin of some residents in the neighborhood as a cause of violence in the sector. From their perspective, the arrival of residents from other sectors of Cali, characterized by high rates of violence, insecurity, and poverty, significantly impacts the quality of life in the area. The participants can also identify these newcomers as "displaced," but they note differences in the reasons

for their displacement. Some, like Yesenia (Yerbabuena), go further in their characterization, pointing out that the women of the Peace Seedbed and their families are victims of violence (both rural and urban), while other inhabitants are viewed as the perpetrators.

In this context, the principle of self-protection involves the identification of risk factors and actions to avoid or minimize them. It represents the transition from identification to action. Citizens are capable of taking action against these agents-factors. In other words, they can report actions, risk factors, and individuals involved to the appropriate authorities or institutions, which can enhance their security. Within this framework, the collaboration among citizens enhances their ability to self-manage both individual and collective protection through non-violent actions.

Some of the protective and self-protective practices against the challenges in the neighborhood, as shared by the participants, include avoiding areas within the neighborhood that are identified as dangerous. Additionally, they inform their families and friends about these areas. Unintentionally, they have created a risk map that outlines the geographical areas, individuals, and risky behaviors in the neighborhood. This "map" is shared among the participants during the organization's meetings and through various channels, such as social networks. This enables them, as Bertha points out, to "protect themselves and ensure the safety of their families and loved ones." They know "where to go" (Tatiana) or "which streets are suitable for a taxi to access the neighborhood... to reach their homes" (Minerva).

Conclusion

Information is power

The analysis of the information collected in the initial phases of the process enables us to draw several conclusions regarding the connection between information, popular communication, legal empowerment, and unarmed self-protection processes. Moreover, it allows us to formulate proposals for intervention-creation to strengthen the community's ongoing efforts.

During the exchange with the participants, the term "empowerment" comes to the forefront. For them, knowledge provides the means to assume control, which means having access to the information required to act or react in specific situations and to "assert their rights" (Jessica). In this context, they emphasize Norma's value as the leader of the organization because of her access to information, which she shares with the community to ensure the resolution of problems and the safety of the residents, even when dealing with entities or State agents like the police.

Two dimensions of "empowerment" emerge in the dialogue with the participants: the personal, associated with their roles as women, and the public, associated with their relationships with neighbors and the geographical territory they inhabit (the neighborhood). These two dimensions coexist. They emphasize the importance of personal "empowerment," which has effects on more public aspects, such as maintaining order and security in the neighborhood, as well as another dimension of a personal nature that, in some cases, helps them overcome instances of sexual violence or domestic abuse.

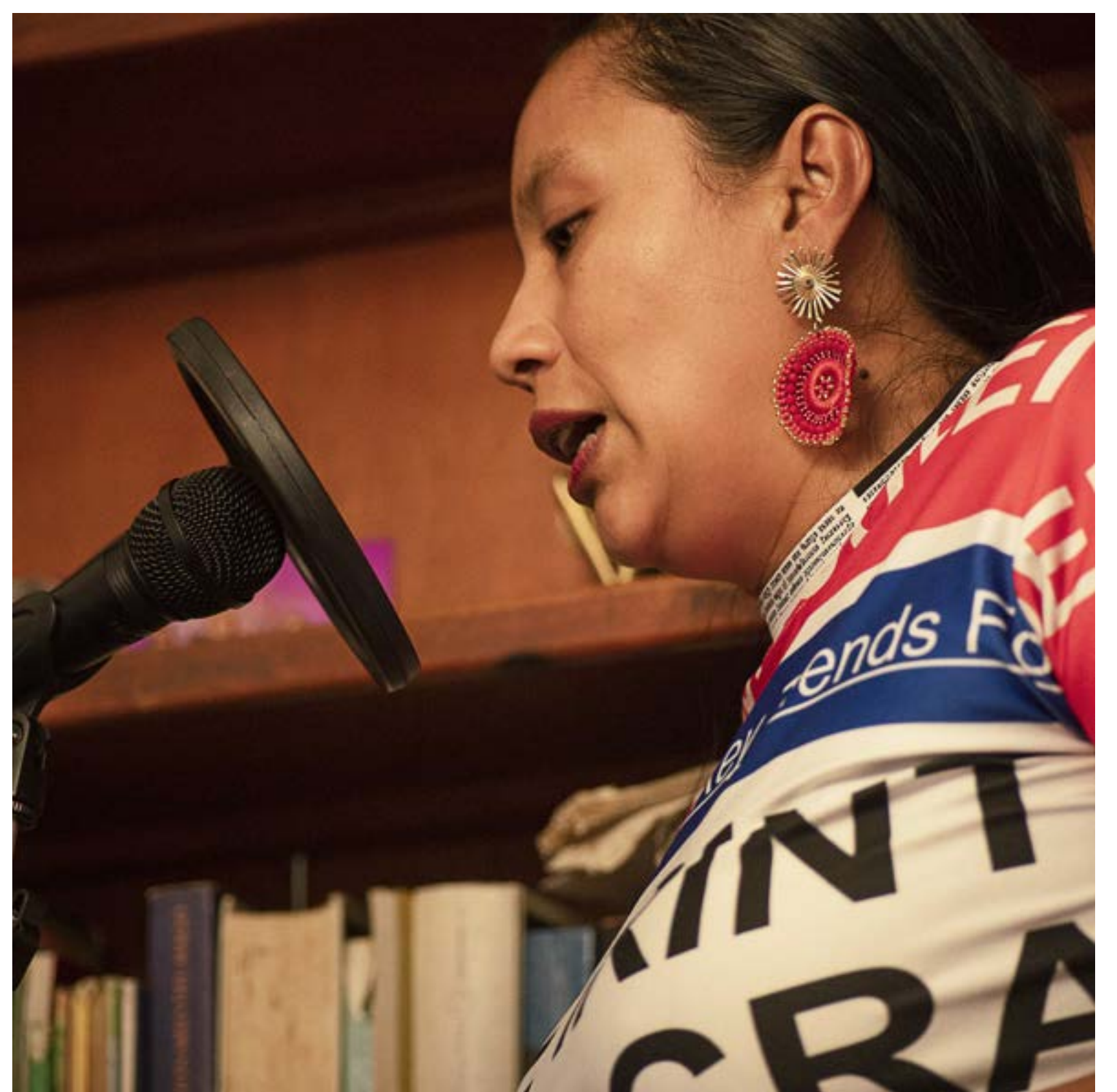
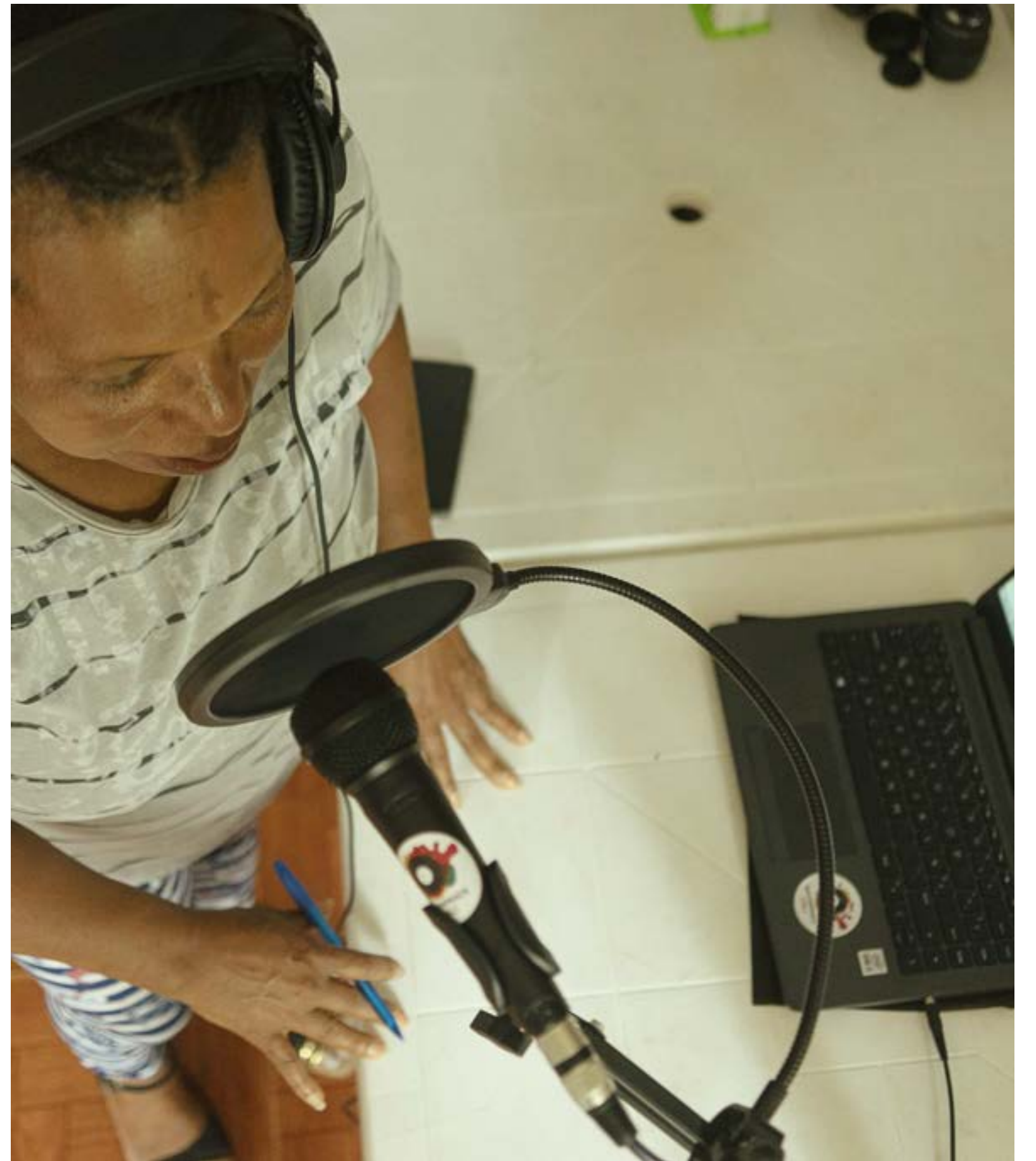
The third topic discussed with the participants is "security." Once again, the distinction between the public and the private sphere becomes evident. They associate security with the feeling of protection. In this sense, terms like family, home, and emotional stability emerge as elements that contribute to defining security within an intimate and personal context.

When discussing "security" in a more public context, the participants initially mention State agents, such as the police, as actors who can sometimes act counter to the establishment of that sense of "security." They naturally bring up the police when discussing security, but as the exchange of ideas progresses, this association shifts in another direction. According to them, security means tranquility, and the involvement of public forces in the sector is primarily seen as involving acts of repression and the marginalization of the residents. Norma emphasizes that, in light of this situation, a prevailing feeling of insecurity persists in the community.

On the other hand, for them, personal and public security hinges on a form of legal security, which involves the law and its interaction with the individuals who enforce it. This is why the role of the police is a recurrent and scrutinized topic in their discourse on security. Due to their lack of trust in this State institution, Norma and the other members of the organization concur that it's essential to be knowledgeable about the law and possess relevant political information to confront not only criminals and illegal armed groups but also to address instances of injustice that might be perpetrated by State officials or agents and both national and local governments.

Security is closely linked with information. From this perspective, the meeting spaces suggested by the organization facilitate access to and the circulation of information. Furthermore, participants emphasize that these gatherings promote the strengthening of relationships and help create a secure environment for the community. They contribute to the formation of a support network that, in turn, aids in building the social fabric—an environment in which individuals can actively listen to and engage with others.

Finally, citizen participation emerges as a topic associated with popular communication and self-protection. The participants' discourse highlights that, for them, the construction of a support network begins with the active participation of each individual.





The nature of this participation varies among women, influenced by their individual interests, expressed needs, and their perception of how the organization responds to those needs. The Foundation provides spaces where they can find their voices and share them with others, intending to strengthen the processes. For example, Norma believes that political training is crucial for women to engage in other areas of public and political life at the local and regional levels. Lina, Madeleine, Jessica, and Norma almost unanimously affirm that "who has the information has the power." Therefore, legal empowerment is once again closely related to the concept of information as a tool for decision-making and the construction of a secure environment within the discourse of these women.

In this perspective, the actions and products of popular communication, such as the podcast series, the WhatsApp groups, as well as community kitchen gatherings, the garden, and "corners of peace," play a role in transforming news into information that is valuable for decision-making and social organization within processes associated with unarmed civil self-protection.



INTERACTION BETWEEN UNARMED CIVIL SELF-PROTECTION MECHANISMS AND REGULATIONS FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE RIGHTS OF VICTIMS OF ARMED CONFLICT

By Italia Andrea Aguado Urmendiz

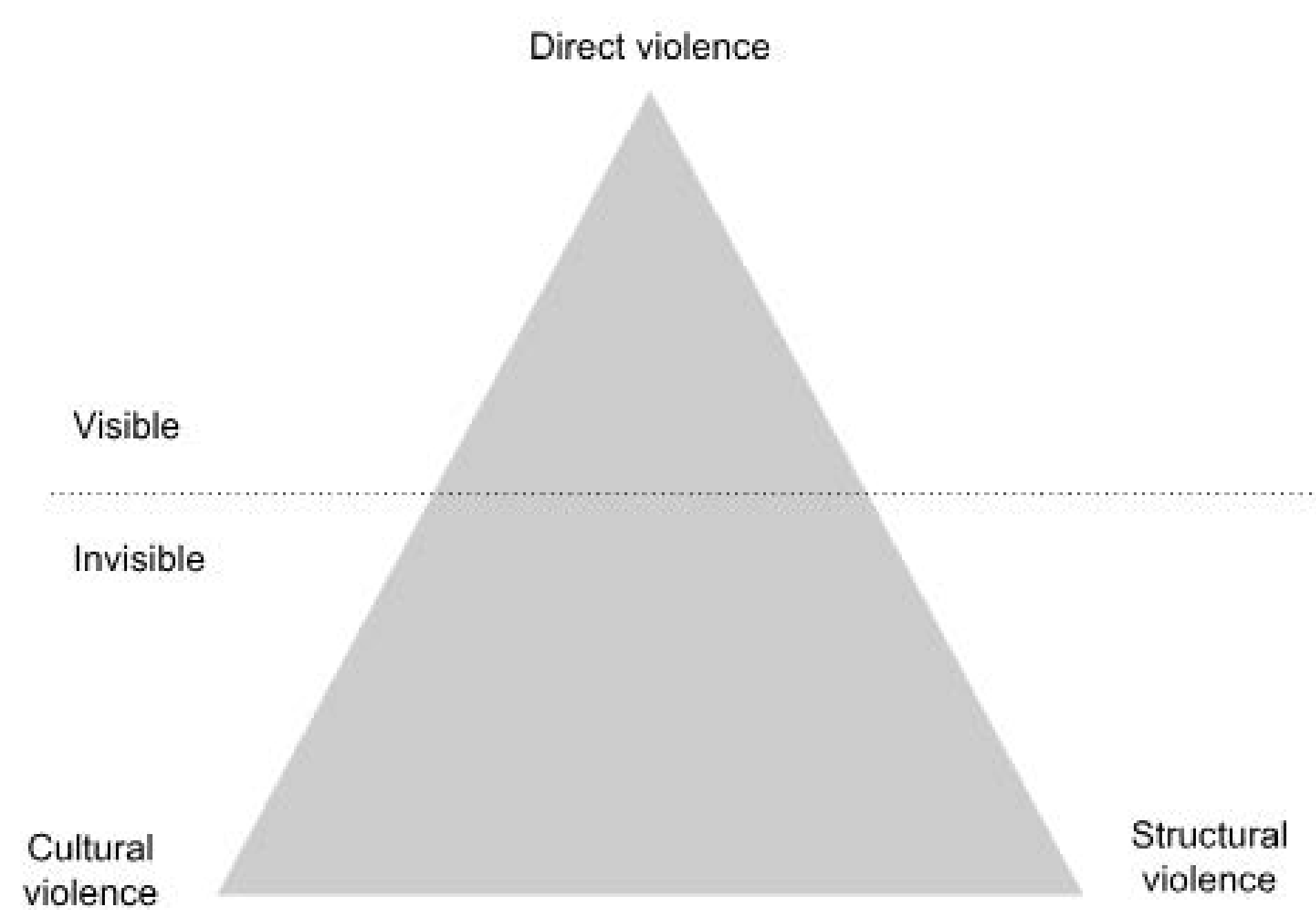
Guiding question: How does the unarmed civil self-protection of the population, which is victimized by armed conflict and resides in socio-urban segregation contexts, interact with the regulations designed to protect the rights of victims established under the 2016 Peace Accords?

The Llano Verde Peace Seedbed group consists of women who are victims of the armed conflict. According to Law 1448 of 2011, the population victim of the armed conflict, refers to “individuals or groups of people who have suffered harm as a result of events that have occurred since January 1, 1985, stemming from violations of International Humanitarian Law or serious violations, evident in the international Human Rights standards that took place during the internal armed conflict” (as defined by Law 1448 of 2011).

The life journey of these women has been marred by painful and violent episodes, stemming from the internal armed conflict (such as the murder of family members, forced displacement, sexual violence, and threats), as well as episodes resulting from urban violence (including revictimization, forced displacement within urban areas, and gender-based violence). From Galtung’s perspective, violence can manifest in the following ways:



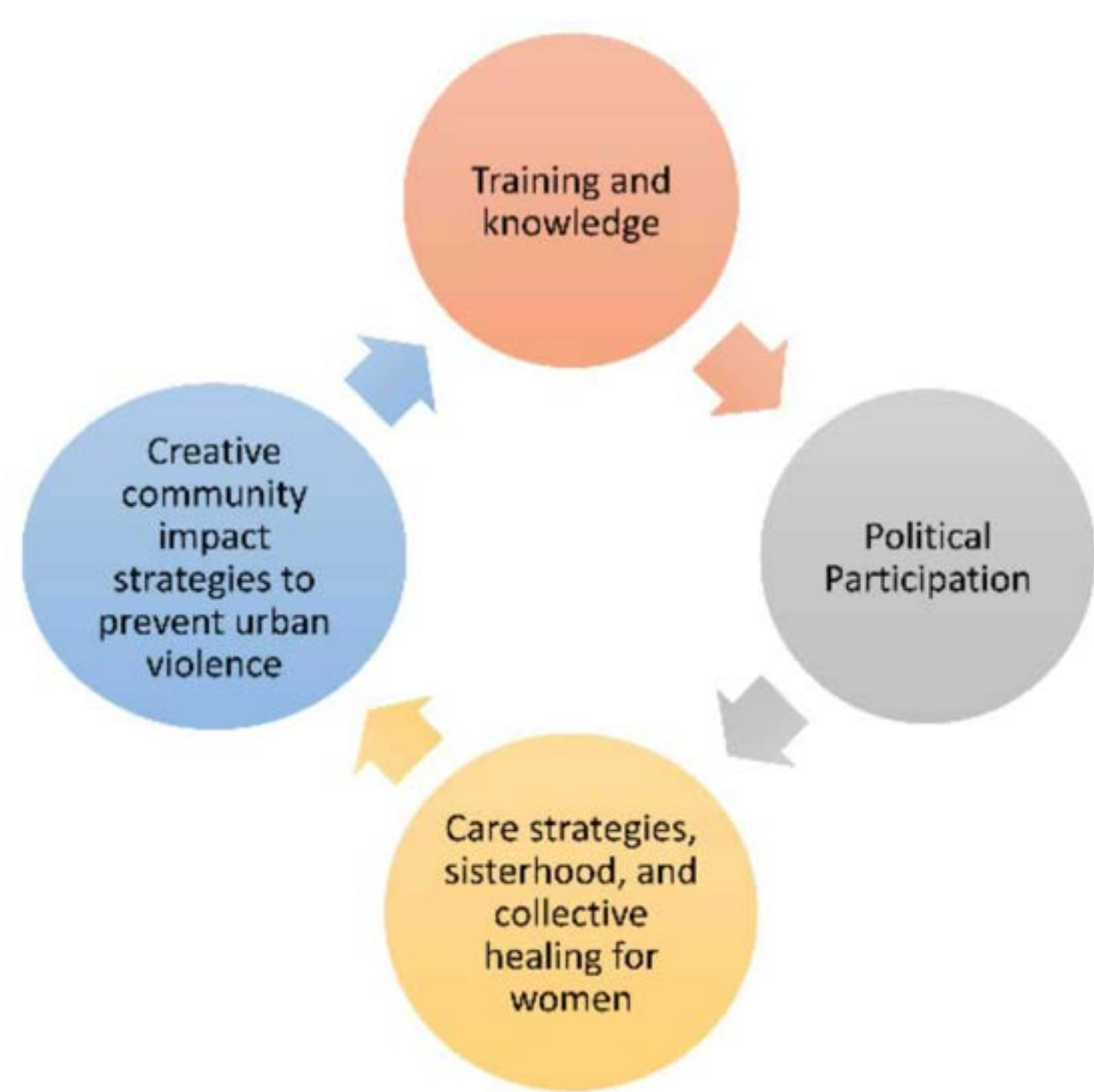
Figure 1. Violence Triangle, Galtung.



Source: Galtung (1998), After Violence: 3R, Reconstruction, Reconciliation, Resolution: Coping with Visible and Invisible Effects of War and Violence.

The women of the Peace Seedbed have experienced the three types of violence as described by Galtung (1998): direct, cultural or symbolic, and structural. Direct violence is evident in observable behaviors intended to physically harm another person. In contrast, cultural or symbolic violence is deeply ingrained in culture and social norms, as exemplified by the stigmatization experienced by individuals residing in the Llano Verde neighborhood. Structural violence is connected to the social and economic model and institutional structures, resulting in systemic inequalities.

Despite the challenges, women have discovered ways to manage difficult situations. They have demonstrated their capacity to take independent actions through unarmed civilian self-protection strategies. These approaches are referred to as mobilizing mechanisms and represent a response to the establishment of urban peace. In the case of the women in the Llano Verde neighborhood, unarmed civil self-protection mechanisms manifest in the following dimensions:



Source: Original work

In the realm of training and knowledge, women have demonstrated a remarkable ability to develop various skills and competencies in their daily lives through training and educational processes. In terms of political participation, women have made significant contributions in various decision-making spaces, such as Community Action Boards and social leadership groups, among others.

In terms of caregiving strategies, sisterhood, and collective healing, women have created safe spaces where they can share their stories, as evidenced by initiatives like "Healing Wounds (Sanando Heridas)," the community garden, and the community restaurant.

Within the dimension of creative community impact strategies to prevent urban violence, women have devised creative methods to prevent instances of urban violence. This includes the design of games and recreational activities in areas with a high risk of violence, as well as strategies for entertaining the neighborhood's youth.

The women in this group have established unarmed civil self-protection mechanisms that engage with regulations to safeguard the rights of victims from two perspectives. The first pertains to promoting compliance with the law through community organization. Thus contributing to the creation of a social network that aids in the healing of the wounds inflicted by the armed conflict.

The second perspective unfolds as victims, thanks to community organization, recognize the normative agreements resulting from the efforts of communities in the affected territories to address the issues faced by victims on the public agenda. It's worth noting that Law 1448 was only enacted in 2011, establishing a system to protect, assist, care for, and comprehensively support victims of the armed conflict in Colombia.

The significance of this law lies in its ability to enable state institutions to organize and assist victims of the armed conflict in initiating processes that encompass not only material reparations but also comprehensive healing to alleviate the suffering caused by the war.

The progress that has been made in Colombia since 2011 in regulatory terms for addressing the victims of the armed conflict is closely tied to the 2016 Peace Agreement, which recognizes the need for victims to be compensated beyond their status as victims. In other words, they need to be seen as citizens with rights. To meet this objective, the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation, and Non-Repetition was created. This system comprises five mechanisms: the Commission for the Clarification of the Truth, Coexistence, and Non-Repetition; the Special Unit for the Search for Persons reported Missing in the Context and due to the Armed Conflict; the Special Jurisdiction for Peace; Comprehensive reparation measures for the construction of peace, and Guarantees of Non-Repetition.

It is important to emphasize the necessity for women community leaders to continue their training in fundamental aspects that enable them to sustain their social fabric processes in the neighborhood. For instance, they can benefit from the methodologies developed by the Commission for Clarification of Truth, Coexistence, and Non-Repetition.

SOCIAL APPROPRIATION OF KNOWLEDGE

The social appropriation of knowledge from unarmed civil protection experiences in vulnerable communities affected by violence can serve as a powerful beacon of hope and learning for other communities facing similar situations. When a community successfully develops effective civil protection strategies without resorting to violence, this experience can be shared and adapted to other contexts, delivering significant benefits to a broader range of people.

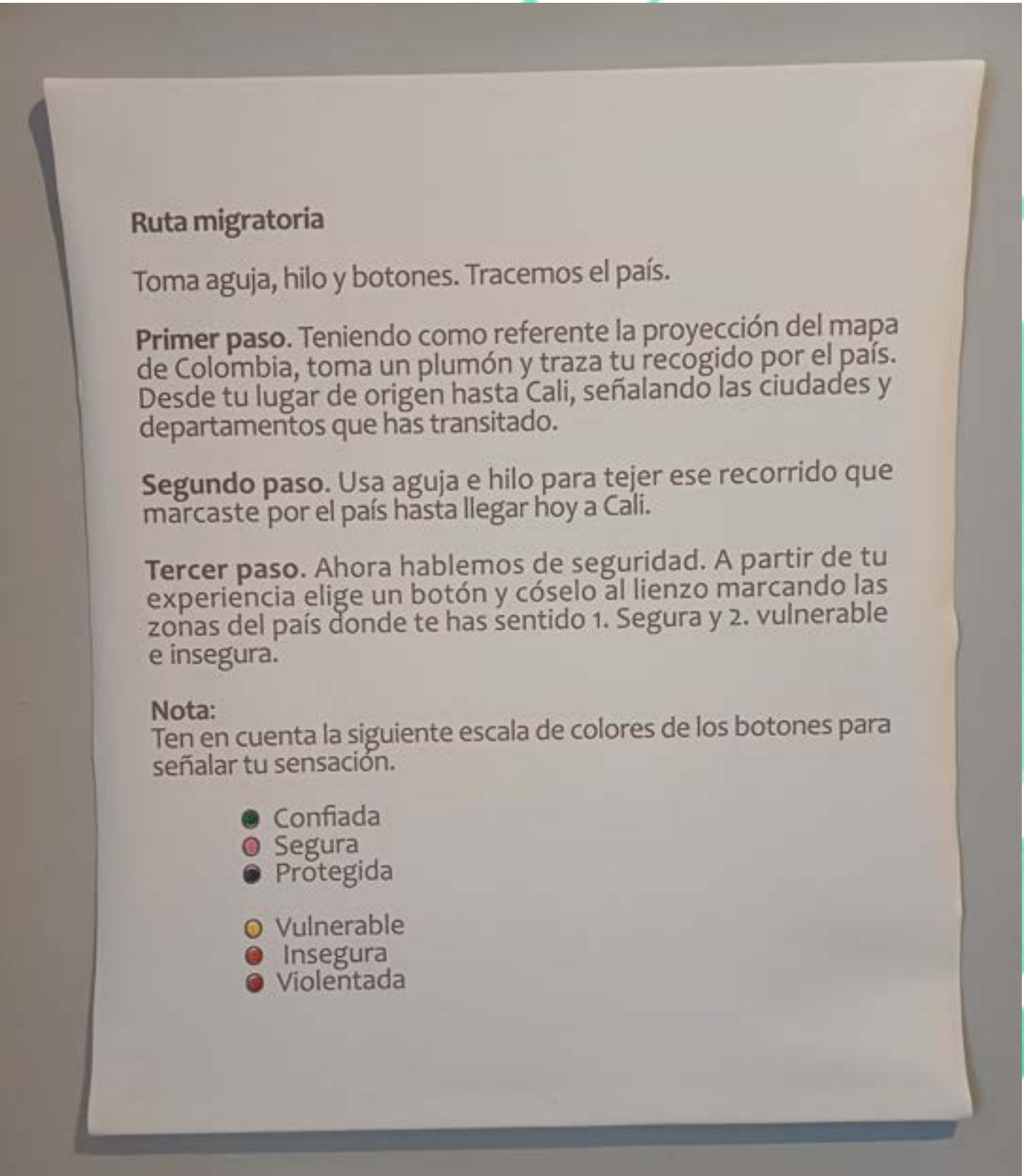
First, spreading this knowledge can expedite the learning process for other communities, helping them avoid common mistakes and adopt proven approaches. This is especially valuable in urgent situations where time is of essence. Furthermore, by sharing their experiences, communities can inspire and empower others to take similar action. This can foster greater collaboration and solidarity among vulnerable communities facing violence, further enhancing their ability to resist and overcome challenges.

The social appropriation of knowledge can also result in the formation of networks and alliances between communities, thereby expanding their

influence and capacity for collective action. This can have a positive impact not only on civil protection but also on other aspects of community life.

In summary, the transfer of knowledge and experiences of unarmed civil protection from vulnerable communities in violent contexts to others in similar conditions is essential for building resilience and promoting peace. These connections between communities can serve as a powerful catalyst, not only for improving the security and well-being of those who resist from the margins against the politics of fear and various manifestations of violence but also for the sustainability of unarmed civil protection initiatives, especially in areas where conflict persists.

In line with this strategy for the social appropriation of knowledge, in addition to this booklet, Masterpeace Cali organized an artistic exhibition that offers an experiential journey through artworks resulting from co-creation processes conducted with the participants of this research. The exhibition is designed to guide attendees through two distinct phases.



Initially, attendees learn about the unarmed civil self-protection experience of this group of women who were displaced by the armed conflict and now reside in contexts characterized by socio-urban segregation. In a second phase, participants engage in the creation of an artwork aimed at fostering reflection on migration, violence, and strategies for collective efforts to promote social cohesion as a foundation for peaceful community organization.





CONCLUSIONS

 The Semillero Llano Verde group is composed of women who are victims of the armed conflict, as defined by Law 1448 of 2011. These are individuals who have suffered damages since January 1, 1985, due to violations of International Humanitarian Law or serious violations of human rights within the context of the internal armed conflict.

 The construction and strengthening of social cohesion through collective memory and community advocacy are crucial elements in the peaceful resistance and unarmed civil self-protection promoted by the Semillero de Paz Llano Verde. These strategies allow the community to address traumas, reaffirm their identity, and assert their rights in the face of a hostile environment. Collective memory serves not only as a healing process but also as a tool of resistance by challenging the invisibility and silence imposed by society. Community advocacy transforms these stories into concrete actions to expose injustices and seek solutions, effectively creating a sense of autonomy from the margins.

 In the practice of community advocacy, these women have developed unarmed civil self-protection strategies known as mobilizing mechanisms, which can be categorized into various dimensions: training and knowledge, political participation, care and healing strategies, and community impact creative strategies.

These unarmed civil self-protection mechanisms interact with the regulations for the protection of the rights of victims of the armed conflict. First, there is support in the sharing of legal knowledge and joint civil action to claim their rights. Secondly, they are raised to the request of Community Action Boards and Municipal and Departmental Tables of Victims, which are key spaces for citizen participation to amplify their voices. In addition, they have spaces such as "healing wounds" that shelters work in a community garden (which anchors them with their territories of origin, but also with the territory that received them), cooking therapy sessions and crafts, where memory is the axis of his stories to heal. And finally, they build strategies that impact the wider community, not just the Semillero de Paz Llano Verde, with campaigns to mitigate drug use and the violence underlying this practice, as well as the use of popular communication to through sound production to empower the community with information on mechanisms to defend their civil and human rights as a protection strategy.



Law 1448 of 2011 and the 2016 Peace Agreement in Colombia represent significant advances in the protection and comprehensive reparation of victims of the armed conflict. These legal frameworks recognize victims as citizens with rights and establish a Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-repetition to address these issues. Community leaders need to continue their training to take advantage of these mechanisms and advance their processes of social fabric in the neighborhood.



Victims of forced displacement who have been pushed to the margins by an exclusive society have been challenged by a dynamic of social disappearance -appealing to the transnationalization of the category of disappeared and its new social uses that allow to illuminate historical and social situations very different from those of the original disappeared person, as they experience ordinary social catastrophes that are renewed and deepened through a terrible reading-and joint management-of their realities by civil society and state institutions to ensure their safety and security, which makes their existence impossible even if they exist (Gatti, 2017).



To speak of unarmed civil self-protection in the case of the Semillero de Paz Llano Verde implies recognizing that this is possible by the construction of an identity linked to the territory as an urbanization of victims of the conflict, through exercises of culture and popular communication focused on a collective memory that is woven from individual narratives that account for the diversity of memories, but also of the cohesion that this diversity makes possible as they are testimonies about the unspeakable, about pain and traumas (although particular, shared), and on the current resistance explained in community advocacy practices as a tool for safeguarding their rights.



The resignifications that the women of the Semillero de Paz make both of accounts about violent past as of categories created to explain and to characterize their relationship -but also their peaceful confrontation- with the new violence to which they and their families are exposed, could be thought of tools with a political sense that do not necessarily seek the direct challenge or the dispute for power, but the achievement of certain early victories related to security and civil protection aspects where the force and importance of the use of language that anchors the present with that past marked by a national history of conflict can be glimpsed, but also with the existence of a Political Constitution in a State of law, in its struggle for transformation/pacification of their territory.

Processing of the information:

The Semillero de Paz community has undergone a transformation in its understanding of information, from seeing it as simple news to a useful social tool for decision-making.

Information is perceived as a tool of power, and those who possess it have the ability to make decisions and build a safe environment.

Through the creation of podcasts, the community re-appropriates their life stories and shares them including advice on what measures to take in the legal framework (without the need for an attorney to intervene), which allows them to collectively build a repository of information relevant to other communities suffering from urban violence.

Popular communication practices:

Popular communication in the community takes place in everyday spaces such as the community dining room and weekly meetings, favoring the construction of ties and interaction between members.

Popular communication promotes the development of the sense of belonging and the construction of a group identity among the women of the Foundation.

Popular communication and legal empowerment:

Popular communication becomes a tool for community legal empowerment, allowing the construction of spaces for dialogue and the horizontal interaction between members and vertical with state institutions

The support of community advocacy by Masterpeace Cali complements the process by offering legal tools for the community legal empowerment and civil self-protection.

Safety and empowerment:

Community associates safety with a sense of physical, emotional and structural protection (the latter in the social sense, that is, with the guarantee of the satisfaction of basic needs and access to rights such as education, decent housing, health, quality employment, recreation), and this security depends on the social cohesion that has been achieved, being a fundamental, strong and indivisible support network; and knowledge of civil laws and legal mechanisms.

Citizen participation is essential for building a support network that contributes to community security and empowerment. It is true that the union and community cohesion that has been achieved through the resignation of memory is the pillar of this support network; however, to amplify its effectiveness in terms of protection and security (and, beyond its borders, to the neighborhood community in general) they must have a voice in spaces of participation such as, for example, the community action boards where this cohesion is raised to a greater (though less consolidated) -even from the margins, for the solution of problems that afflict them.



BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bliesemann de Guevara, B., & Ridden, L. (2023). Unarmed civilian protection. Revista Issue 82 – artículo 10. <https://odihpn.org/publication/unarmed-civilian-protection/>

Calveiro, P. (2018). Indigenous resistance in Mexico [Lesson material]. Seminar Collective Memories and Political Struggles, Higher Diploma Collective Memories with a gender perspective, CLACSO.

Chaterjee, P. (2008). The Nation in heterogeneous time and other subaltern studies. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI.

Galtung, J. (1990). Cultural Violence. Journal of Peace Research, 27(3), 291-305.

Gatti, G. (2006). The narratives of the detained-disappeared (or of the problems of representation in the face of social catastrophes). CONfines, 2(4), 27-38.

Gatti, G. (2017). POLEGÓMENO For a scientific concept of disappearance. In Disappearances. Local uses, global circulations. Bogotá: Siglo del Hombre Editors.

Jelin, E. (2001). The works of the memory. España: Siglo Veintiuno editors.

Latour, B. (2008). Reassembling the social: an introduction to actor-network theory. Buenos Aires: Manantial Publishing.

Lederach, J. P. (2003). The Little Book of Conflict Transformation: Clear Articulation Of The Guiding Principles By A Pioneer In The Field. Madrid: Editorial Good Books.

Martínez, M. (2020). Living dead: Suspended lives during/after gender violence. Death Studies, 44(11), 718-726.

Piper, I., et al. (2013). Social psychology of memory: spaces and policies of remembrance. PSYKHE, 22(2), 19-31..I

"Desarrollo de capacidades de protección civil en mujeres víctimas del conflicto armado mediante la comunicación popular y el empoderamiento jurídico comunitario"

Esta instalación propone un recorrido experiencial en el que se presentan los resultados principales del proyecto de investigación "Desarrollo de capacidades de protección civil en mujeres víctimas del conflicto armado mediante la comunicación popular y el empoderamiento jurídico comunitario" liderado por Masterpeace Cali con el apoyo de la Network Plus "Creating Safer Space", financiada por el Arts and Humanities Research Council del Reino Unido a través del Global Challenges Research Fund.

A partir de un enfoque basado en un diseño de investigación-acción, Masterpeace Cali propone un acercamiento a estrategias innovadoras de construcción pacífica que asumen las poblaciones civiles desplazadas en contextos urbanos donde la violencia persiste y se escala pese a los procesos estatales de resolución.

MASTERPEACE CALI



www.masterpeace-cali.org
cali@col.masterpeace.org

Grupo de investigación MasterLab – Masterpeace Cali

Dra. Luisa María Colonia Zúñiga

Dr. Gustavo Adolfo Suárez Ríos

Mg. Italia Andre

Fotografía

Ingrid Largo Osj

Museografía

Liliana Cabrera I

Producción

Lina Vélez Montoya



@masterpeace_cali
 @masterpeacecali
 /masterpeace-cali